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**“Women’s Work”:**  
**An exploration of the impact of**  
**women’s learning experiences**  
**on their life**  
**expectations and aspirations**

**Linda Bernice Barlow-Meade**

**2004**

**PhD**

**“Women’s Work”:**  
**An exploration of the impact of women’s**  
**learning experiences on their life**  
**expectations and aspirations**

**Linda Bernice Barlow-Meade**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the  
University of Northumbria at Newcastle  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**November 2004**



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## **Abstract**

This study explores the processes involved in the construction of female aspirations and expectations.

Early research has a male centrality that excludes female experience which is seen as deviant. More recent research makes aspirational predictions based on single variables such as education or class, or works with single cohorts of participants. My interest lies not in *what* a woman's aspirations and expectations are, nor with making predictions, rather, I am concerned with the processes involved in *how* aspirations and expectations develop, in how these processes remain stable or change over time.

By processes I am referring to knowledge constructions. Taken-for-granted knowledge has asserted that women naturally aspire to wife and motherhood. Regardless of the seeming inviolability of such knowledge, it does not represent absolute truth; it is constructed from discourses imbued with vested interest, power and control. Thus, from a social constructionist perspective, I explore the discourses instrumental in the construction of women's aspirations and expectations and the associated power structures that limit or expand women's options. I show that discourses are not static, that constructions change and are socio-politically historically relative.

Survey data provide broad views that inform in-depth interviews. Voices from the literature form an integral part of the account and are not presented separately. A narrative analytic strategy synthesises all the voices to form a multi-layered socio-political, historically situated oral history of two generational cohorts' aspirational/expectational development, cohorts I have designated mature women and teenage women.

In conclusion I show that legislative changes alone are insufficient to change women's aspirations and expectations. The mature women in the study illustrate how traditional discourses impacted on their lives and how, although individual agency is difficult, it is possible to bring about change which influences the options available to future generations of women. The teenage women in the study, whilst cognizant of increased opportunity and equality discourses, illustrate the persistence of traditional discourses and the conflicts they face in navigating their own lives.

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**Dedication**

In memory of Phyllis – a most loved and inspirational grandmother.

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## **Acknowledgements**

As is only to be expected in such a long-term project, many people have travelled this road with me, people who richly deserve my sincere thanks.

Most of all, I would like to thank all the women, schools and organisations who have worked with me, without whom this project could not have taken place. I thank you all for the time you have given me, for your generosity, frankness and honesty.

My particular thanks go to Cathy Given and John Swain, my supervisory team. Thank you for reading work in progress, for sharing your knowledge, and for being unfailingly supportive and motivational, for maintaining an unwavering belief in my ability to complete this work when I could see nothing but darkness.

My thanks also to the many professionals who have responded to my requests for information, in particular Dr Whitehead, University of Cambridge; whose kind assistance provided the starting point for the construction of my survey. My thanks also to all my proofreaders and critical friends who *have* been able to see the wood for the trees.

And, last but not least, my love and thanks to my husband, to my family and friends, whose patience must surely have been tried by me talking about little else but this project for what seems like, what is – in fact – years.

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**Author's Declaration**

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for any other academic purpose. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person other than that properly and fully acknowledged in the references.

Date: 11 November 2004



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## **“Women’s Work”:**

### **An exploration of the impact of women’s learning experiences on their life expectations and aspirations**

## **INTRODUCTION**

*She stood there, as all women stand who have made themselves remarkable by their originality, ... as a person freed of her hampering and inconvenient sex, ... unfettered from the conventionalities of manner prescribed by custom for household womankind.*

(Hardy – The Hand of Ethelberta)

*The fire glows red in its black-leaded range, dancing in concert with flickering gas mantles, on the mantelpiece a photograph of a young girl bottle-feeding a baby is thrown into relief by the frolicsome flames. The cosiness of this scene is belied by the cold running water, the ritual bathing in the tin bath dragged in from the yard on Sunday nights, the outside toilet and cold potties under the beds, by the peelings amassing in the scullery for the pigman’s weekly collection and the pile of old clothes to be exchanged for blue and white-striped crockery on the ragman’s occasional journeyings.*

*Mam wears the trousers in this house, she prefers to be out at work rather than at home with the children, and what mam prefers goes. Dad is the labourer, at work and at home, and the little girl is the domestic apprentice.*

*The girl fails her 11+ but doesn’t care; none of her girlfriends pass either. But she’s not stupid, she knows many things. She knows her parents couldn’t afford to send her to grammar school, even if she had passed. She knows she must go to work and earn money; the family needs it. So she leaves school at 15 and begins work on a factory assembly line, and finds herself singing along – with the other women – to the sounds of the Sixties.*

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### **Me, Myself, I**

This is not a mid-twentieth century remake of Jane Eyre, nor is it a literary device for engaging readers' interest. Quite simply these are scenes from my early life, the material conditions of which will be recognisable to many working-class girls born in northern cities in the early 1950s.

I have no memory of questioning my circumstances in my early childhood, this was simply the way things were, but in my early teens I do remember rejecting the idea of becoming a wife and mother, probably because my parents were not a glowing advert for marital bliss. I remember feeling different in this rejection because it seemed to me that most of my female contemporaries did see themselves as being married and having children. Whether they viewed these roles as aspirations or expectations is now impossible to say.

All I can say is that when I was growing up, it seemed to be socially accepted that women worked in offices, shops, and factories for a short time on leaving school, and then settled down to domestic life. In the main, women of my generation, particularly working-class women, didn't aspire to or expect to go to college or university or to have careers. But I don't want to give the impression that women viewed their future as being filled with doom and gloom, far from it. Like most of my peers, I was looking forward to leaving school, to being an adult, to having leisure and money of my own to spend. These were exciting times for young people, an era popularly presented as the 'Swinging 60s', and I was more concerned with the relative merits of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, of pan-stick and eye liner than with college or careers – end of story. Or is it?

As the years have passed my life has changed beyond all recognisable expectations for women of my generation and class. I have experienced higher education, starting as an Open University second chancer, and I have developed a career, teaching adults. I now spend a lot of time working with groups of women on Personal Development (PD) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training courses. Many of these women were, like me, labelled as failures at school and, as a consequence, bring much negative emotional and educational baggage to the learning environment.

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I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the women I have met in my work because on reflection, they have sown the original seeds of this study. Many of their informal fragments, or anecdotal evidence, began to crystallize when I was working on my Master's dissertation, and developed into the recurrent theme of: 'things are different for girls today', that girls are "*more equipped now when they leave school*" (Barlow-Meade:1997:60) for their adult lives. I increasingly found myself wondering – are things different for girls today and what is meant by 'things'? These questions made me look at my own experiences again with a more critical eye. What was it that had determined my path at transition points in my life?

The previous example concerning my family provides one illustrative answer to this question. Compared with other families around me, mine was unconventional in that mother was the boss and went out to work and father did most of the domestic and childcare tasks in addition to being employed. But it was also conventional in that my domestic apprenticeship – to use Oakley's (1974a) term – began early; the photograph of me feeding my baby sister was real. My childhood experience was confusing when compared with other families in my neighbourhood. Mothers and girls did housework and looked after children, fathers and boys did not. But my mother didn't do housework and childcare and she was a girl, so why was I compelled to do it? My father did do housework and childcare and he was a boy, so why should my brothers be exempt? Why did some members of the extended family belittle my father because he did these things? And perhaps most important of all, what made me think this arrangement was odd?

Through this research I have come to understand that people's experiences are social constructions, that is, they are built upon discourses and come about through social interactions. Social constructionism and discourses are concepts that will be discussed fully in Chapter One. For the moment I will briefly say that there are dominant discourses (Gergen 1989, Burr 1995) that, over time, have come to represent natural laws and direct the ways in which people live their lives. Foucault (1972) remarks that to describe a discourse is to '*discover that whole domain of institutions, economic processes and social relations on which a discursive formation can be articulated*' (pp163-5). In addition, Foucault (1972) makes the point that discourses are the '*practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*'

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(p49). For example, to speak of the traditional nuclear family is to invoke various institutions such as marriage, church and state, economic processes such as paid employment practices and social relations such as the division of domestic labour. In this nuclear family the man is positioned as head of the household, he is the principal economic provider, upon whom wives and children are dependent. As the head of household he exercises power and control in the family. In adopting and living this traditional nuclear family model, in adopting the appropriate gendered roles of this model, people are at the same time systematically creating what the nuclear family is.

Clearly, my father wasn't a fully paid up member of this fraternity, there was no way his word was law in our house, neither would his unskilled, labouring wages have been sufficient to support a wife and four children. Thus, some family members saw my father as deviating from the then socially accepted male norm, and it may be that it was this interpretation of his behaviour that resulted in their criticism and censure.

Another dominant discourse that impacts on women's lives is that of motherhood. This discourse invokes institutions such as education and economic processes such as employment and the benefits system. In this view all women aspire to be mothers; it is their natural role and ultimate achievement in life. Furthermore, good mothers are positioned in the home looking after their children, whereas women who contest the discourse are abnormal, they are going against nature. And as most women do have children, so they recreate the motherhood discourse.

Again, clearly, my mother was not a fully paid up member of the mother and baby club. She could be deemed aberrant in that she went out to work. More aberrant still, she didn't feel guilty about going out to work, she enjoyed it and would have done so whether we needed the money or not. Neither did she feel guilty that my father, sister and I did most of the housework and childcare tasks. I remember my friend's mother saying she felt sorry for me, that it was a shame that I had so much housework and childcare to do, and that there was no meal ready when I came home from school. And to tell the truth, as a child I felt sorry for me too!

In the past legal and/or social penalties were imposed on aberrant females, for example, the penalties for being a disobedient wife have been as severe as

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incarceration in a mental institution. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *'Judge William Blackstone had announced that husbands could administer "moderate correction" to disobedient wives, and there were other means: as late as 1895, Edith Lanchester's father had her kidnapped and committed to a lunatic asylum for cohabiting with a man'* (Women of Hastings & St Leonards IR22). Whatever my father's private thoughts, there was no way he was ever going to position my mother as an obedient wife, nor position himself as meting out punishment for disobedience.

The concept of 'positioning' is an interesting one. Davies & Harre (IR4) suggest that people are positioned within discourses, that there are people who have the dominant voice and it is usually their version of events that is heard. My mother's was the dominant voice at home. She resisted the traditional motherhood discourse by going out to work, thereby positioning herself in a dominant role by participating in the then male sphere of employment; however, she may not have held a dominant position in this public sphere. My father, on the other hand, occupied a subservient position in the home, whereas at work he may have occupied a very different position. The fact that people hold different positions in different contexts illustrates how the self is constructed and reconstructed depending on the particular context and interactions one is involved in.

How then was my life going to evolve, being the product of two aberrant parents?

As I have said, I found my early childhood experience confusing. I was positioned as a working-class, female child and expected to behave according to accepted practices for these categories, regardless of the fact that my parental role models were aberrant and contradictory, a situation that had more impact on my life than I had realised prior to beginning this research.

As a child I desperately wanted my mother to be like other mothers, to be there when I got home from school, to have my tea ready. But as I got older and started to think about my future, I wanted my life to follow *some* aspects of hers. I wanted the independence and material things that work appeared to provide, she could afford to buy Chanel perfume, but I didn't want marriage and motherhood, probably because my parents' marriage was not a happy one. Even my mother capitulated to marriage,

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although she resisted its stereotypical form. Her resistance to traditional female roles provided me with lessons in alternative constructions; thus, my childhood learning experiences influenced my aspirational/expectational development and as such have a bearing on this research.

In the positivist research tradition, researchers are notably absent from their accounts, in this tradition researchers attempt to suspend their gender, race, class and culture and the influence these factors have upon the research endeavour (Broch-Due 1992), their aim being to be as objective as possible. However, objectivity becomes a problematic concept when one considers that positivist research is subject to '*external factors and constraints (such as the funding institution's policies) [and] internal factors such as the researcher's desires, interests, and preoccupations*' (Drapeau IR5), all of which impact on the issue being investigated and the methodologies adopted, no matter how objective one seeks to be.

Interpretivist epistemologies, on the other hand, question the feasibility of arriving at positionless truth, of the researcher's ability to stand outside gender, race, class, and culture, of framing positionless research questions. Arvay (IR2) suggests that as researchers '*we need to understand the nature of our participation in what we know. We need to include ourselves in our research texts in visible ways in order for the reader to discern our interpretations*'. Thus in recent years it has become increasingly common for researchers to state their positions explicitly.

What this means is, it is impossible to approach the research endeavour totally devoid of personal history and my personal history has shaped this research, a personal history that I felt would contribute to my understandings of the mature and teenage women's experiences. Although I feel that I understand particular situations and people *because* I share the '*social practices and ways of thinking and being which constitute*' (Stevens:1996:30) my particular society, nevertheless, I still have a responsibility to question these shared understandings, this everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge, even though, as Wetherell (1986) notes, the taken-for-granted or obvious '*is often the most difficult to penetrate and criticize*' (p77). I cannot assume that mine and the mature women's understandings of and responses to certain

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experiences will be the same. Neither can I evaluate the teenage women's experiences against my own because the teenage women are situated in a different sociohistorical time frame. All I can say – to paraphrase Acker (1981) – is that my identification with women born in the 1950s shaped my conception of the problematic nature of women's aspirational/expectational development.

Due to my explicit position in the research, I am not a '*positionless speaker*' (Davies:1992:54) and realise that there are consequences to taking up such a personal position. For example, whilst reflecting on my experiences has sharpened my understanding my own aspirational/expectational development, as Woods (1993) reminds me, I must ensure that seeming similarities do not dull my critical faculties; I must remember that I am also a researcher and look beyond my own experiences in exploring those of the participants. Neither can I claim to be presenting objective, universal truths, nor that this account applies to all women at all times, as if 'women' were an homogenous group. All that I can claim is that this is the story of the mature and teenage women who worked with me at a particular point in time. However, I hope that this story will enable other women to recognise how their own aspirations and expectations have been constructed, and how discourses may be accommodated or resisted. I am not suggesting that this is the only way of presenting these mature and teenage women's aspirational/expectational development, this account represents my construction of events and I accept that alternative constructions are possible.

### **Purpose, Aims and Research Questions**

My main purposes in conducting this study are to explore the learning experiences of a group of mature women and a group of teenage women as a means of identifying the discourses that have shaped their aspirational/expectational development and to determine if there has been discourse stability and/or change across the time span of the two groups. In this context learning is both formal and informal, i.e. learning in an educational establishment and learning from everyday experience in a variety of situations.

When I started thinking about this study I wrote in my research diary (RD) that I felt the '*life experiences of ...women remain the same regardless of social, economic,*

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*political and educational changes*' (RD:1997:4). My feeling was that life hadn't changed very much for today's girls, even though many women of my own age I talk to – now in our 50s – do think there has been change. So, are things different for girls today? If so, how are things different, and if not, what remains the same?

In pursuing the purposes of this study I aim to:

- Explore the socio-historical, political contexts of the two groups
- Hold discussions with the mature and teenage women to talk about their learning experiences
- Identify the major discourses relating to their learning experiences
- Explore the links between the discourses and the women's aspirations and expectations
- Identify similarities and differences between the two groups

Ultimately I will attempt to answer the following questions:

- In what ways is female aspirational/expectational development socially constructed?
- Has there been discourse stability/change across the time span of the two groups?
- Are 'things' different for girls today?

The evidence upon which this thesis is built is a synthesis of the mature and the teenage women's perceptions and experiences, together with my own and the voices of the historical, substantive and theoretical literature.

### **Voices from the Literature**

Voices from the historical, substantive and theoretical literature are an integral part of the thesis. As well as current work, I have tried to include literature that is contemporary with the two groups of women because I think it provides an insight into the social conditions prevailing at the time – a literature which, referring to Foucault (1972) again, is partly responsible for creating those social conditions. As



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these voices are heard throughout the work I have not included a separate literature chapter. However, it is necessary to indicate where this study is located in the body of knowledge relating to women's aspirational/expectational development, consequently what follows is a brief discussion of a few examples of previous research in this area.

Early studies of aspirational/expectational development (e.g. Raffe 1979 and Blackburn, Stewart & Prandy 1980) tend to be grounded in a male worldview, investigating single variables such as educational or occupational achievement. In the early studies the sample tended to be male and even where females were included, male experience was taken as the yardstick against which variables were measured. Gaskell (1977) suggests this might have been because a woman's status was dependent on her husband's achievements rather than her own, or that it was too complicated to include women in analyses because the variables used to identify male aspirations did not easily fit women's life trajectories. In this sense women are presented as deviant, as outside 'real' male experience (Alder *et al* 1995).

Proctor and Padfield's (1994/5) work shows that male experience continues to be the yardstick in some studies. They conclude that the women in their study are different to those reported in earlier research because they show an occupational centrality which is demonstrated by high levels of determination, initiative, forward planning and a strong commitment to work – which have traditionally been described as male traits. In other words, these women are described as achievers in male terms.

Thus, a woman is described as 'other' for not striving to emulate male success norms, (i.e. she embraces traditional female norms), and she is described as deviant if she does, (i.e. by adopting traditional male norms).

Some studies relating more specifically to women start with the concept of sex-role ideology. Gaskell (1977), for example, found that many of the girls she worked with held traditional sex-role beliefs, i.e. they aspired to marry and have children and thought that whilst some equality in marriage was a good thing, generally the husband should have the final say in family matters and the majority believed that domestic work was largely the woman's responsibility. Just under half the girls in

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Gaskell's study did aspire to professional occupations, but they reported that they would prefer not to work when they had preschool children. As Gaskell points out, these girls appear to be facing conflict concerning what a woman's role should be.

Marini (1978) and Danziger (1983) remark that although some sex-role change appears to be taking place, sex-role differentiation continues to be a powerful societal norm that largely positions men in the occupational sphere and women in the domestic sphere. In this view education is not considered to be important for women because educational achievement is associated with occupational achievement, which has little relevance to women's lives. However, this argument ignores the fact that women's workforce participation has increased continually since the end of the Second World War (Halsey 1988, Hakim 1996). At the same time, the persistence of sex-role differentiation means that employed women still carry the main responsibility for domestic and childcare tasks, a situation that causes tension and again leads to ambiguity and conflict about what a woman's role should be.

In terms of factors impacting on aspirational/expectational development, Marini (1978) discusses the importance of family influences. The direction given by parents (particularly mothers), the roles parents play and their attitudes to these roles can either reinforce prevailing social norms or provide alternative models. In Marini's view, girls with working mothers are more likely to expect a lifetime of work themselves and be more career-oriented than girls with non-working mothers. In addition, Furlong & Biggart (1999) comment that young people develop ideas about the gender-appropriateness of particular occupations that broadly reflect the gender distribution of occupations within their families and the local labour market, and that these factors serve to constrain their occupational choices.

As well as the influence of the family, Marini (1978), Sandberg *et al* (1987) and Danziger (1983) emphasise the importance of socio-economic background. Danziger (1983), for example, suggests that the higher a girl's socio-economic status, the more male-oriented her achievement values and aspirations will be, which again places the male worldview as the yardstick against which girls' aspirations are measured. In this view, a girl's educational achievement would not make much difference to her aspirations if she came from a lower socio-economic background where more

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traditional sex-roles are the norm and career aspirations low. On the other hand, Canter (1979) argues that women's sex-role beliefs remain traditional **regardless** of socio-economic background, and that these beliefs operate to keep women's educational and occupational aspirations low.

Of particular importance to aspirational/expectational development is the concept of 'perceived ability'. Canter (1979) suggests that women are perceived, (and perceive themselves) as less competent than men, that female achievements (and female achievers) are devalued in society. It is Dangizer's (1983) view that people develop and adjust their aspirations according to personal assessments of their own ability – an assessment often based on the objective evidence of academic performance. However, because girls do not see academic grades as a determinant of their future plans they may devalue their own ability or avoid academic achievement situations as much as possible, thereby effectively limiting their own opportunities.

By the late 1980s, the research community began to articulate a change with regard to the female role. Furlong (1986), for example, states that traditionally girls were influenced by a desire to be feminine and they prepared themselves for marriage rather than for employment. The change identified in Furlong's study is an acknowledgement that girls can have career aspirations and that marriage and motherhood do not have to signal the end of these career plans. Furlong highlights girls' increasing academic achievements as one factor that has contributed to changed perceptions of what girls can do. Nevertheless, it is also noted that this change has created its own conflict in that many girls continue to feel pressured to play down academic success for fear of frightening off potential boyfriends. Picking up on the changed perceptions of female ability, the women in Proctor & Padfield's (1994/5) study had career plans at the time of leaving school **and** expected to marry at some point in the future. Proctor & Padfield conjecture that possible reasons for this difference are that many aspects of the social world have changed and women in general have become more work oriented.

Compared with the 1950s, by the late 1980s the world had changed (Giddens 1991 & 1994, Beck 1994). One example is that the 1980s witnessed the disintegration of the youth employment market in Britain, (Biggart & Furlong 1996). As a result, many

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young people, girls included, had little choice but to continue their education to gain the inflated qualifications needed for the few jobs that were available. As a result, young people have come to **expect** to continue their education, because they can no longer leave school at 16 and walk straight into employment.

Regardless of the changes identified in these examples, other work in the 1990s, such as that of McGivney (1993), emphasises the enduring resilience of traditional sex-role ideology. In accounting for this McGivney suggests that factors such as access to learning, childcare, finance, partner support and institutional indifference to women's needs all continue to act as serious barriers to widening women's aspirations and expectations.

These examples of previous research have a tendency to evaluate women's aspirations and expectations against male norms and to isolate single variables such as sex-roles, educational achievement, perceptions of ability, family influence, socio-economic background and structural influences. Rather than examining these variables in isolation, I feel that they are all interconnected and that together they make *'some things possible and others impossible, [they permit] us to say some things but makes other things unthinkable'* (Danaher, Schirato & Webb:2000:16). The question is: do these factors make some aspirations possible and others unthinkable for women? A related question is - do the aspirational/expectational constructions of one generation shape those of the next? Research conducted by The Guide Association (2000) suggests that there is no clear answer to this question. The Guide Association research indicates that whilst mothers continue to be girls' principal role models, today's girls are struggling with the conflicting demands of tradition and change.

### **Positioning the Study**

Having considered some examples of previous research relating to female aspirational/expectational development, I would suggest that this study differs in a number of ways.

Firstly, much previous research has been based on data obtained from single groups of participants. I have worked with two distinct generational groups – whom I have

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designated mature women and teenage women – in an attempt to compare their experiences and identify aspects of stability in their experiences.

Secondly, previous research has adopted theories such as socialisation, personality traits and sex role ideology as the basis of aspirational/expectational development. I have adopted a social constructionist perspective in an attempt to identify the discourses influencing women's aspirational/expectational development.

Thirdly, I have attempted to identify examples of accommodating and resistant behaviour as a means of illustrating how discourses can remain stable or change over time. Horsman (1990) explains that people do not have to completely accept prevailing discourses. It is possible to use language to adapt and contest the assumptions implicit in any discourse. *'As we participate in resistant discourses, we are part of a process of changing perceptions of experience and forming new subjectivities'* (Horsman:1990:23). Exploring the participants' learning experiences I am interested in discovering how far they have conformed to prevailing discourses, and how far they have contested them, that is, in how far they have been agentic in bringing about change.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Theoretical Perspective: Social Constructionism**

At the start of the research I pondered a number of issues that had arisen from comments made by women who had participated in my Master's research and anecdotal evidence I had been party to whilst working with women's groups, as well as thoughts about my own aspirations and expectations.

I began to wonder, if I had been born male, if I had been born in a different generation or social class, if I had been born disabled or of a different ethnicity, would my aspirational/expectational development have been different? These thoughts suggested that not only might women's aspirations and expectations be different depending on any or all of the above factors, but also by their sociohistorical context. Thus, in order to explore women's aspirational/expectational

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development, I needed a vehicle that would accommodate multiple variables as well as the socio-historical, political context. In addition, I was particularly concerned about the concept of 'voice', that is, I wanted the participants to be heard, and at the same time I knew that I would find it difficult to exclude my own voice. As I have already said at the beginning of this Introduction, the origins of the research are grounded in my experiences, a factor I do not want to camouflage. A further point was a concern to travel to a deeper level of understanding than a simple comparison of the aspirations and expectations held by generational cohorts of women, I wanted to travel to a level that would provide explanations of how aspirations and expectations actually develop.

Increasingly I became aware that I needed a theoretical framework that would allow for a multi-layered account, which social constructionism does, with its emphasis on the sociohistorical context and the importance of language and discourse.

Thus, the theoretical framework of this study is social constructionism and in Chapter One I consider the importance of historical and cultural influences for an integrated understanding of the human condition (Gergen 1973 & 1985); the way in which constructionism has been instrumental in forcing a new conceptualisation of 'self' (Parker 1999), the meaning of discourse (Foucault 1972, Shotter 1977, Gergen 1989), the way in which people are positioned within discourses (Davies & Harre 1990), the concepts of power and social control (Burr 1995, Gergen 1989, Parker 1989), the concepts of contestation, agency and change (Burr 1995, Willig 1999, Burkitt 1999), and the debate concerning realism-relativism (Osbeck 1993, Burr 1997, Kenwood 1999, Wetherell & Still 1998).

## Chapter Two

### Conceptual Focus: Aspirational and Expectational Development

Chapter Two explores the central substantive concepts of 'aspirations and expectations'. These terms are often used interchangeably but, following Pollard & Tann (1993), I have attempted to distinguish between them.

As a starting point for contextually positioning female aspirations and expectations I discuss aspects of social change as exemplified by Giddens (1991 & 1994) and

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Beck's (1994) traditional / post-traditional social orders; post-traditional society may also be understood as reflexive modernity, high or late modernity. Picking up on the theme of travelling to a deeper level of understanding, I then move on to explore various discourses that impact on women's aspirations and expectations.

### Chapter Three

#### Methods – Theory & Practice

I describe this study as a qualitative inquiry, even though quantitative methods are also incorporated, on the basis that how data are employed determines the degree to which a study is designated qualitative or quantitative, rather than the particular data collection and analysis methods themselves.

In the first instance the conceptual and theoretical perspectives influenced the methods employed. It was important that the participants' voices were heard and that the sociohistorical context was incorporated. Consequently I first surveyed a large number of mature and teenage women to gain a broad understanding of the issues. The survey data then informed in-depth interviews with a smaller number of participants. Throughout voices from the literature provide a sociohistorical narrative.

I wanted the end result to be a narrative account or oral history of these women's aspirational/expectational development, not a statistical representation, and to that end I have adopted a narrative analytic strategy.

This chapter discusses the participants, the interviews, and the methods used in the analysis and presentation of the data.

### Chapters Four – Eight

#### An oral history of the learning experiences of the mature women

In Chapter Four: 'Born Circa 1950', the mature women talk about their early family experiences, for example the division of domestic labour, female characteristics and childhood socialisation, marriage and motherhood and the employment of married

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women. Chapter Five: '1960s Schooldays – The Best Days of Our Lives', covers aspects of the mature women's educational experiences.

In Chapter Six: '1960s/1970s Crossroads', the mature women talk about the decisions they made as they prepared to leave school. They talk about the changing social scene, romance, school and family influences and their aspirations and expectations. In Chapter Seven: 'Actions Speak Louder', the mature women talk about what they actually did when they left school. They talk about marriage and motherhood, about divorce and growing up, about employment, harassment and discrimination.

Finally, in Chapter Eight: 'Reflections and Projections', the mature women reflect on what they think life is like for girls today and whether it is different to their own experiences.

#### Chapters Nine – Eleven

An oral history of the teenage women's learning experiences

In Chapter Nine: 'Born Circa 1980', the teenage women talk about their early family lives, about male and female roles, marriage, children, domestic work, having a voice and their perceptions of change. Chapter Ten: '1990s Schooldays – The Best Days of Our Lives' deals with the teenage women's attitudes to school, the importance of education, gender issues and maternal influence.

In Chapter Eleven: '21<sup>st</sup> Century Crossroads', the discussion centres on the teenage women's options as they leave school, their aspirations and expectations, the support they receive from family and school, and the nature of equality at work and in domestic life.



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## Chapter Twelve

### The Times They Are A Changing

In this final chapter I draw the thesis to a close by showing how aspirations and expectations are social constructs that develop through diverse discursive interactions, and that these constructs are relative to the socio-political context in which they occur. I attempt to answer the questions: Have there been changes between the two groups? Are things different for girls today? Have these mature and teenage women accommodated or resisted the dominant discourses? Have they shown evidence of personal agency and brought about change? And finally, I end by suggesting issues for further research.

A final note – in the thesis ‘**IR**’ refers to an Internet Reference, all of which are located at the end of the conventional references.

No single piece of work can influence overall social change very much, but I hope this thesis will be taken as a small contribution to changing women’s lives for the better. Knowledge of how women’s aspirations and expectations develop is not *‘incidental to what is actually going on, but constitutive of it’* (Giddens:1991:14).

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## **Chapter One**

### **Theoretical Perspective: Social Constructionism**

*All theory, my friend, is grey, but the golden tree of  
actual life springs ever green.*

(Faust: Studierzimmer)

#### **Introduction**

In early 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain there is a popular perception that life opportunities for women have expanded considerably over the last 40 - 50 years. At the beginning of the new millennium the *Times* (17.8.2000) remarks that although the '*glass ceiling has yet to shatter ... there are few careers and educational opportunities that are not now open to women*'.

At the heart of this study lie the aspirations and expectations of two generational cohorts of women and my interest in exploring how these women came to develop their particular aspirations and expectations. The key word here is 'develop', where to develop is to build, to add to or to construct. It was the concept of 'constructing' aspirations and expectations that led me to adopt social constructionism as the theoretical perspective of this study.

This sounds so straightforward as I write it, whereas in reality determining the theoretical perspective was probably the most tortuous aspect of the work. From the outset I had wanted to include historical, social and political perspectives as well as the perspectives of the participants and myself, but I was unsure about how best to bring them all together. When I raised these problems with my supervisors they recommended that I read Gergen's work on social constructionism. What a Damascene experience that was. Everything fell into place and my struggles to incorporate the participants, myself and the sociohistorical, political context were resolved when I learned I could merge all these voices in the production of a multi-layered oral history. Consequently, in this opening chapter I will discuss the development of social constructionism, the importance of language and discourse and the problematic nature of human agency and material reality. Before beginning

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this discussion however, it is important to stress that there is no single school of thought as to what constitutes social constructionism, a point I will return to on page 31.

### **From Crisis to New Paradigm**

In order to understand constructionism, I need to comment briefly on the historical context in which it developed because, as with any other concept, these developments are important in that what happened in the past '*conditions, limits and creates, what happens now*' (Parker:1990:93).

Constructionism is located within the field of social psychology, which Gergen (1973) defines as the branch of psychology that deals with human interaction and Edwards & Potter (1992) define as the study of '*social cognition, of how individuals perceive, categorise, interpret the social world, represent it mentally, make inferences about it, explain it causally*' (p13). The raison d'être of psychology is to establish universal laws regarding human behaviour through systematic observation and with reference to social psychology Gergen (1973) remarks that these '*laws are developed in order to describe and explain social interaction*' (309).

Social psychology is firmly embedded in North American and British empiricist analyses of human behaviour, particularly that dating from the period of the Second World War. At this time governments in both countries were keen to gather information that could be used for propaganda purposes and the manipulation of people. Typical research questions concerned how to maintain troop morale, how to encourage people to eat unappetising foods, how to demoralise enemy troops etc., and governments and industry were more than willing to pay for this kind of research, which leads Burr (1995) to remark that social psychology was '*an empiricist, laboratory-based science which had habitually served, and was paid for by, those in positions of power*' (p11).

After the Second World War criticisms began to be levelled at social psychology for pursuing decontextualised laboratory experiments that took no account of the effects of the real world in which ordinary people lived, and for promoting the values of dominant groups while the voice of ordinary people was silenced. These criticisms

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eventually led to what has come to be regarded as the 'crisis' in social psychology. Parker (1999) remarks that the crisis was brought about by a *'dissatisfaction with 'silent' psychologies across the discipline and a sensitivity to the importance of language in human activity ... Human beings are not silent, but conduct most of their psychological activity through speaking'* (p25).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Britain and America witnessed increasing social unrest among far from silent groups of people who were *'hostile to control by oppressive governments'* (Still:1998:36). Young people were particularly vociferous on issues such as the futility of the Vietnam War and the evils of racism. Gergen (IR10) remarks that the *'moral outrage of the Vietnam war raised significant questions concerning the many complicit institutions'* who had vested interests in the type of research being conducted. When one considers that governments and industry were funding much of the research, one can understand why the discipline's claims to scientific neutrality were criticised as being simply a means of *'legitimizing unjust and exploitative policies'* (Gergen IR10). The problem was that these powerful institutions could easily maintain their position, whereas ordinary people had limited access to voice and occupied relatively powerless positions, making it difficult for ordinary people to effect change. The situation was increasingly considered to be unjust, and truth no more than propaganda; there had to be alternative explanations which would give access to *'voice to those otherwise dispossessed by the scientific establishment'* (Gergen IR10), one such dispossessed group being women.

This crisis in social psychology meant that the idea that ultimate truth is only discoverable through objective scientific practices itself came under scrutiny. There was an increasing insistence that what people have to say about their experiences and how language is used, is at least as important as empirical experiments, and that personal accounts should therefore constitute valid data. It is this turn to language that has come to be seen as the new paradigm, where language and discourse are *'the structuring material of human understanding and practice'* (Parker:1999:25).

In addition to this turn to language, in 1973, Gergen was arguing that *'knowledge cannot accumulate in the usual scientific sense'* (p310) because the social facts upon

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which human behaviour are based rarely remain stable, rather they are constantly in a state of flux. The consequence of this line of reasoning is that it is only possible to understand the world as it is at any given moment in time, reasoning that contradicts empiricist claims that knowledge can be extrapolated across time and populations. A number of challenges result from this paradigm shift, perhaps the most important of which is that knowledge is a socially constructed and context dependent phenomena, that nothing can be fully understood if one is dealing solely with decontextualised laboratory experiments. Gergen (1973) also emphasises the primacy of historical and cultural influences, maintaining that *'Political, economic, and institutional factors are all necessary inputs to understanding in an integrated way. A concentration on psychology alone provides a distorted understanding of our present condition'* (p319).

I think it was probably this statement above all others that led me to adopt a constructionist perspective. I had a feeling that one doesn't simply pick an aspiration from an unbounded list. I felt there was probably a link with history in the sense that what one generation of women have done in the past influences what future generations of women will do, and that institutions can constrain or open up what it is possible for women to do. I felt that talking to women about their experiences alone wouldn't be enough. In effect, without taking into account their sociohistorical, political context I would be on the verge of conducting my own decontextualised laboratory experiments.

Through the way he questions what constitutes knowledge of human affairs, Gergen (1985) stresses the importance of language. From this perspective, knowledge does not reside in individuals' heads; rather, people construct knowledge together through interaction. This is a major epistemological shift because it rejects the concept of individuated mental constructs, emphasising instead social beings whose *'dreams, hopes and fears [or aspirations/expectations] will be moulded and influenced by our social context'* (Wetherell *et al*:1998:15).

Thus, together with language, social processes are centrally positioned in constructing people's experience and actions, and individual psychology is *'built from ... communications and relationships with others'* (Wetherell *et al*:1998:p17).

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That is, constructionism is a perspective in which the kind of person one is and can hope to become is grounded in the social practices and ways of thinking and communicating that are assimilated from the particular cultural and historical contexts in which one lives (Stevens 1996). The implications of this perspective are that women do not simply choose particular aspirations and expectations of their own volition; their aspirational/expectational development is a social construction built from social processes, interactions with others and the sociohistorical context.

Regardless of having identified language and social processes as central to this perspective, as I briefly mentioned on page 28, a precise definition of what constitutes social constructionism is problematic. In his review of constructionist writings, Danziger (1997) comes to the conclusion that there is no single definition, no school of social constructionism, rather *'the contributions of psychologists mingle with those of sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, literary theorists and many others'* (p 400), thereby reflecting the diversity of the field. Gergen (1985) and Burr (1995) concur, saying that although there may be some common characteristics, such as taking a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; a belief that knowledge is sustained by social processes and that knowledge and social action go together, there is nothing that is common to all constructionists. Indeed, Gergen (IR10) maintains that whilst there is a *'pervasive tendency to view current constructionist inquiry as a unified front'*, all that can really be said is that *'Nothing is legislated and nothing is fixed – including the meaning of constructionism itself'*.

Indeed, Potter (IR16) suggests that to attempt to define constructionism is an anti-constructionist activity. To do so implies that there is a 'thing' that is constructionism, a thing that can be *'neutrally and objectively described and defined. This would be a realist account of constructionism ... precisely the thing that constructionism rejects'*. Potter continues that rather than trying to define constructionism, it would be better to consider how constructionism itself is constructed by its various proponents and critics, and to look at the areas of investigation it opens up. In my case, constructionism will enable me to examine how women's aspirations and expectations develop and how discursive power serves to constrain or liberate women's lives.

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Although it is not possible to arrive at a single definition of constructionism, there are two areas of interest that require further examination as an aid to understanding this theoretical perspective, namely conceptualisations of self and the importance of language and discourse.

### **Conceptualisations of Self**

Traditional western psychology is grounded in '*self-contained individualism*' (Sampson:1989:1) where the self is a distinct, integrated, unitary whole with predetermined attributes, a monad free to make her own choices and to determine her own course of action separate from others around her. This individuated self is consistent across situations and whilst separate from other individuals, is influenced by the rest of society (Wetherell 1986). In this sense the self has '*one true nature or set of characteristics waiting to be discovered and once discovered a correct description of these characteristics will follow*' (Potter & Wetherell:1987:95).

Because selves are distinct and their attributes can be measured, individuals can be compared and contrasted across dimensions such as ability, temperament, intelligence, motivation and personality traits. Allport & Allport (1911), for example, devised tests for just this purpose. These dimensions are said to make up the personality or character of the person and are part of a '*genetic inheritance uniquely combined inside each individual*' (Burkitt:1991:17). From this perspective the self becomes an object that can be '*discovered and described in much the same way as can any object in the natural or physical world*' (Crossley:2000:529). For example, ability and intelligence have been tested for the purposes of allocating different types of education and diagnosing '*indications of 'degeneracy' and 'delinquency'*' (Burman:1990:208).

Thus, the ability to compare and contrast individuals means that particular facets of personality, behaviour and attitude can be designated as desirable or undesirable and laws can be developed to regulate how people 'should' behave. Through long usage these laws take on the appearance of natural laws and become '*instilled more deeply in each self*' (Burkitt:1991:7). Implicit in the devising and application of such laws is the ability to control human behaviour, for if laws, rules and taken-for-granted

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knowledge state what people 'should' think, do and be, then by implication they also state what people 'should not' think, do and be.

Thus the ideology of the autonomous individuated self fosters social control and continues to exert its influence in western society even though this ideology is now subject to much critical analysis.

Constructionists argue that '*selves, persons, psychological traits and so forth*' (Sampson:1989:2), are not naturally occurring objects residing in individuals, rather they are constructions brought about through discursive interactions between people, which makes the self variable, context dependent and distributed. Socor (IR19) comments that '*all things, including what it means to be human and to be a 'self', are contingent*' upon whom one is with and the context one is in at any particular point in time. There is no such thing as human nature shaping the world and because there are no objective criteria by which one might discover this nature, '*All knowledge is conditional; all selves provisional*' (Socor IR19). By virtue of the fact that self is constantly being constructed and reconstructed, it is impossible to define what the self is, or to make generalisations concerning the experiences of selves because '*such selves and experiences differ in relation to historical, cultural and practical contexts*' (Crossley:2000:529). Potter & Wetherell (1987) suggest that if one accepts a differentiated model of the self, then the realist principle is undermined, thus researchers should focus on '*the multiplicity of self-constructions and their social and interpersonal functions*' (p103).

By way of illustration, in different contexts I could describe the person I am as a researcher, a teacher, a wife, a friend, a mother, a patient etc. However, each of these selves can only exist when it is '*called out*' (Shotter IR17) through interaction with others. There is no 'I' that is unconditionally researcher, teacher, wife, friend, mother or patient because self is provisional and conditional, dependant on the historical and cultural contexts and discursive interactions that shape it. My reply is never uniquely my own because when I reply I am responding to the call or gesture of another, just as they are responding to mine. Therefore actions cannot be attributed to me or them; rather actions are 'ours', the outcome of 'our' discursive interaction. In creating this joint action we are creating the kind of person each of us is in this particular early



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21<sup>st</sup> century British, contextual world. It is from this social interaction, this contingency, that our sense of self emerges. There is no one unconditional 'I', only a self that will be '*constantly in flux, constantly changing depending upon whom the person is with, in what circumstances and to what purpose*' (Burr:1995:40).

And even this isn't the end of the story – the interactions we engage in are themselves located within various discourses that facilitate subject positioning and power relations. Thus, we are not the authors of our distributed selves, rather these selves are the product of the various discourses in which we participate, discourses that serve to control who we are, what we do, and who we can hope to become.

This line of reasoning raises questions concerning women's aspirational/expectational development. If discourses control who we are and what we do, does this mean that women's aspirations and expectations are in some way controlled, that women are unable to exercise choice or act agentically?

The concept of agency is both complex and problematic for constructionism; it is a concept I will return to and discuss in more detail on page 41. For the moment I want to return to the second issue I highlighted as being necessary to an understanding of constructionism, namely the importance of language and discourse.

### **Importance of Language and Discourse**

As I have indicated in the discussion above, language and discourse are essential components of constructionist reconceptualisations of self. As such, it is important to take some time here to examine these concepts, to understand what they mean.

The concept of 'discourse' may be understood in two distinct ways; firstly by focusing on language itself and secondly, by focusing on discourse as a system of representation.

Burr (2000) refers to the focus on language as '*situated language use*' (p63), meaning the conversations that occur between people and/or texts. According to Hepburn (2003) this first meaning of discourse refers to the way in which '*words*,

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*idioms, metaphors, accounts, stories and so on are put together in the course of interaction'* (p176). Here, language use is an interactive process that enables people to structure and share their experiences. The words used do not – of themselves – have any intrinsic meaning, they do not represent a preordained reality; rather, the meaning of words is negotiated in social interaction and mediated by the context in which people find themselves, thus language use is relative.

This does not mean that there is no structure to language use; if this were the case a state of chaos would exist. Rather, language is structured into discourses which provide spaces that permit '*certain things to be said by certain people and ... certain subject positions are allowed and others proscribed*' (Parker:1999:25). For example, the way I might talk about being a mother is part of a taken-for-granted knowledge of what constitutes a 'good' or 'bad' mother that people in my society understand. This does not mean that everyone will agree with prevailing definitions of a good or a bad mother; neither does it mean that these concepts are static, it only means that people in this society understand this discourse. What I say about being a mother serves to position me as either a good or bad mother relative to the 'other' I am in interaction with. In this way language and discourse provide social stability.

Dreyfus & Rabinow (1982) suggest that the second meaning of discourse relates to the '*historically situated systems of institutions*' (pxx). In Foucault's terms this means that discourse is a '*system of representation*' (Hall:2001:72), a '*type of language associated with an institution, and includes the ideas and statements which express an institution's values*' (Danaher, Schirato & Webb:2000:x). Burr (2003) calls this macro-constructionism, a position that goes beyond the immediate context of the speaker to the '*forms of language available to us [that] set limits upon, or at least strongly channel, not only what we think and say, but also what we can do or what can be done to us*' (p63). Thus, Foucault's system of representation is '*much broader than language, and includes many other elements of practice and institutional regulation*' (Hall:2001:78).

I have already mentioned (p12) Foucault's (1972) contention that to describe a discourse is to examine whole domains of institutions, economic processes and social relations. Danaher *et al* (2000) suggest that there are relatively enduring and

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stable sets of relationships between people and institutions. To illustrate, they cite educational institutions such as schools and universities where each institution has its own established rules and procedures, roles and positions that regulate behaviour, as well as what can be said and by whom.

When these institutional rules and procedures have bureaucratic and/or legislative authority, they also have the legitimacy to shape people's lives (Horsman 1990). As regards the institution of education, the eleven-plus selection test had legitimacy and the results of this test certainly shaped people's lives. Alternatively, the rules and procedures of state law will determine whether a persistently abused wife is deemed to have committed murder in killing her husband, the outcome of which decision undoubtedly has authority and will undoubtedly shape her life, positioning her as either a criminal or a victim.

Burr (2003) simplifies Foucault's (1972) concept of 'domains' by saying that *'numerous discourses surround any object and each strives to represent or construct it in a different way'* (p65). This is done through spotlighting different aspects, by raising different issues and by having different implications for what we can do. In other words, discourses produce certain ways of understanding what is meant by concepts such as 'education' or 'guilt', or aspirations and expectations, at any sociohistorical point in time.

Carabine (2001) sums up this second definition of discourse by saying that discourses are *'variable ways of 'speaking of' an issue which cohere or come together to produce the object of which they speak ... discourse interacts with, and is mediated by, other discourses to produce new, different, and forceful ways of presenting the issue'* (p273).

The discursive focus of this study lies with the second definition, with the ways in which institutions, economic processes and social relations determine what women can say and do and be, together with how these discursive formations change over time.

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Sheridan (1980) suggests that changes in institutions occur not for philanthropic reasons or scientific advance, but because of a '*general change within the institutions themselves, in response to economic and social pressures or, rather, to men's experience of change in their social and economic relations*' (p33). For Foucault, old codes of knowledge determined what was seen and for change to come about these old '*codes had to be transgressed and transformed, [change requires a] simultaneous change in seeing and saying*' (Sheridan:1980:39-40). Although change is therefore possible, it is also the case that changes in one discursive formation do not necessarily give place to '*another whole new world of objects, concepts or theoretical choices ... A number of elements may remain unchanged, yet form part of a new discursive formation*' (Sheridan:1980:109). For example, women's increased workforce participation does not necessarily change the requirements of their domestic role.

In this second definition, then, discourses are a complex set of shared terms and assumptions which '*cohere in some way to produce both meanings and effects in the real world*' (Carabine:2001:268). Although they sometimes take on the appearance of natural laws, they are not static. Each person is positioned within many, often competing, discourses, a multiplicity that '*enables us to envisage ways of disrupting the dominant discourse and to construct positions of resistance*' (Burman:1990:209). People who engage in resistant behaviours may be seen as change agents or troublemakers, depending on one's point of view. As Rorty (1993) points out, politically useful change is possible when '*people begin saying things never said before thereby permitting us to visualize new practices*' (p4). Thus, this multiplicity means that, potentially at least, women can contest dominant discourses, can behave agentically and bring about change, both in their own lives, and subsequently, through acting as role models, in the life choices of the women who come after them.

In the previous pages I have used terms such as power, social control, agency and change, these are key concepts and as such need further elaboration.

### **Power and Social Control**

Taking power and social control first. It would be a mistake to suppose that language is neutral or fixed; it is not, it has political connotations and consequences for people

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in the real world. This means that language is *'a site of variability, disagreement and potential conflict. And when we talk about conflict, we are inevitably dealing in power relations'* (Burr:1995:41).

Sheridan (1980) suggests that Foucault defined power as something that is *'exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege' of a dominant class, which exercises it actively upon a passive, dominated class* (p139). In this view, power is *'embedded in everyday relationships at every level of society, and [operates] through various regimes of discipline and surveillance'* (Bradley:1996:p104). Because power resides in everyday relationships, resistance must take place at a local level. However, *'because it is a network and not a collection of isolated points, each localized struggle induces effects on the entire network'* (Sheridan:1980:139).

Knowledge is intimately bound up with power because what I can do to someone else, what others can do to me, what obligations I have to abide by are determined by what constitutes knowledge in my society at this particular point in time. For example, employers can no longer exercise power over women by refusing them employment solely on the basis of marital status. Burr (2003) remarks that we can *'exercise power by drawing upon discourses, which allow our actions to be represented in an acceptable light. Foucault therefore does not see power as some form of possession, which some people have and others don't, but as an effect of discourse'* (p68). Knowledge and power are thus inextricably linked and when one can show that truth is socially and historically constructed to suit the purposes of particular groups and interests, then it is at least theoretically possible *'oppressed and subjugated groups to use 'power-knowledge' in their own interests'* (Gibson:1986:131).

In this knowledge-power continuum the coding, classifying and analysing of human behaviour serve to normalise and correct us. *'This is what Foucault terms 'disciplinary' power, and it operates through surveillance and observation'* (Hepburn:2003:140). An example of how this surveillance works can be provided by the educational institution with its testing, observation, grading, etc. Whilst most people would accept the need for some recording of pupil information, the current obsession with recording ever increasing aspects of pupils' educational experience,

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seen from a Foucauldian perspective, raises worrying questions. Of particular concern is the way in which people come to self-monitor, i.e. discipline themselves, as a result of their familiarity with prevailing forms of surveillance. This self-monitoring increases the docility of the populace and at the same time increases the power of those who wield the current dominant knowledge constructions.

In this sense we are positioned and position others in discourses. Davies & Harre (1990), identify different types of discursive positioning, for example, interactive positioning whereby one person is positioned by what another person says, and reflexive positioning whereby a person positions herself.

In interactive positioning, a woman may be subserviently positioned by her mother-in-law's remark, "my son says you don't cook real dinners", and in reflexive positioning, she may subserviently position herself by thinking, "I'm not a very good wife because I never seem to have enough time to cook real dinners". In both examples the woman is subserviently positioned in a traditional marriage discourse which states that a wife's role is to service the material, emotional and sexual needs of her husband. However, Davies & Harre (1990) remark that '*it would be a mistake to assume that, in either case, positioning is necessarily intentional. One lives one's life in terms of one's ongoingly produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production*' (p48). It could well be that the mother-in-law is positioning her son as inadequate in an equality discourse and the wife has misinterpreted the interaction.

On page 35 I mentioned Parker's (1999) view that discourses create spaces that allow certain people to say certain things, that some subject positions are allowed and others proscribed. For example, in health discourse a doctor takes up an authoritative subject position and the right to say certain things that the patient doesn't. Burr (1995) suggests that '*Once we take up a position within a discourse ... We then inevitably come to experience the world and ourselves from the vantage point of that perspective*' (p145). That is, using the above metaphor, once I take up the position of 'patient' I draw on certain ways of speaking and behaving I consider analogous to that position, rejecting others that are not. My doctor may position me as a submissive patient when he/she speaks to me as a person lacking in professional knowledge; or I may position myself as a submissive patient through my willingness

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to accept the doctor's professional judgement. In this way I position others, i.e. I may place the doctor in a more powerful position than myself by virtue of my perceptions of the doctor's superior knowledge. By taking up an alternative position, say as a customer/client of the medical services, I exercise power at a local level by utilising alternative discourses for my own use, the effects of which may pervade this particular network.

Thus, some positions afford us personal power and some do not. Where a person sees herself as occupying a powerless position, this can have negative consequences for her perception of self and her ability to exercise power in that particular context. However, a person does not have to accept powerless positions, change – though often difficult – is possible. Change can be effected by recognising the positions others place us in and those that we in turn offer others when we interact with them. By recognising these positions we can then *'devise strategies for how unacceptable positions might be resisted and positions in alternative discourses taken up'* (Burr:1995:152). The positions one occupies are not static, neither are they uni-directional, that is, if a person finds herself lacking power in one context, this does not mean that she is powerless in all her interactional encounters. As Burkitt (1999) notes, *'Each individual in a network of relations may have talents, abilities, capacities, opportunities or resources that give him or her leeway to take up a more powerful position or to resist the government of his or her actions'* (p72).

Whilst there is the possibility of movement, flexibility and change in the positions one occupies, particularly at the micro-social level, it has to be said that macro-social discourses do serve as powerful agents of social control; that these 'dominant' discourses place constraints on what people can and cannot do. Dominant discourses shape society through a repetition of their utterances which are often *'ensured or encouraged by the law and other state constraints such as the benefits system and the laws of the church'* (Burr:1995:55). Dominant discourses thus ensure social stability because they are entrenched in society as institutionalised custom and practice.

There are people and institutions that have vested interests in the dominant discourses, people and institutions who are obviously motivated to maintain their

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position. In Gergen's (1989) terms, such people and institutions have warranting voices and it is their version of events that is heard and acted upon more often than others. What they say has the appearance of truth, perhaps because they have the authority and resources to make it so. On the other hand, there are groups, women, black, working class, disabled, gay and lesbian people, who have a long history of restricted access to voice. You may agree or disagree with my examples of silent groups, which may say something about your own access to voice and power, but the point I am making is that people who cannot make themselves heard '*have little role in the co-ordinated set of daily activities from which life satisfactions are typically derived*' (Gergen:1989:73).

An unmarried, unemployed mother, for example, has limited voice in determining the level of benefit payments she receives. However, access to voice is not simply a matter of having the opportunity to be heard, or of being 'allowed' to speak. As Burkitt (1999) remarks, this woman's lack of voice is also related to '*how the devices and institutions of the state and economy interpenetrate everyday life, which in turn feeds back into these structures*' (p75). For the unmarried mother this means that her lack of voice concerning level of benefit payments is intimately tied up with her position in discourses of marriage, femininity and motherhood, all of which she may be deemed to have contravened by the very fact of her being an unmarried mother, depending on one's point of view; it is in this way that the institutional aspects of discourse permeate all aspects of life. Thus Parker (1989), in discussing Foucault's work, maintains that '*What is spoken, and who may speak, are issues of power*' (p61) where selves are not '*parts selected at will, but are set in a variety of power-infused discourses*' (p67).

### **Contestation, Agency and Change**

The example of the unmarried mother brings me back to an issue I briefly mentioned on page 34, 'agency'. Is it possible for the unmarried mother – or any of us – to change our positioning? From a constructionist perspective, change brought about through personal agency is a problematic concept. It is problematic because decisions to act cannot be individual decisions, they must be the result of interaction with others, and therefore decisions to act must be joint decisions. In addition, not everyone has equal access to voice in all the discourses. The unmarried mother



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becomes objectified in the benefit payments system and as Davies (1992) remarks, to be an object is to be someone who is *'deprived of agency and who is subjected to the agentic acts of others'* (p63), which suggests that some people are powerless to effect change in some contexts.

However, Parker (1991) maintains that the human capacity for reflection lies at the heart of human agency, and enables people to bring about change; Willig (1999) and Burr (1995) makes similar comments. Burr (1995) suggests that each person is *'capable of critical historical reflection and is able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and practices that it takes up for its own use'* (p90). It is possible to argue that the unmarried mother could 'read' her story of benefit dependency *'against the grain'* (Davies:1992:74), that is reflect on it and reject her positioning within this discourse, choosing instead to take up the position of wage earner in an employment discourse.

Reading against the grain, being reflexive, choosing alternatives is nowhere near as simple as this statement makes it sound, rather it implies a thorough understanding of the discourses one is currently living, as well as an understanding of alternatives. More to the point, the discourses a person is currently positioned within continue to be a powerful force, coexisting and competing with possible alternatives, after all, the discourses the unmarried mother is currently living constitute her sense of self. Consequently, although change is possible, it is also difficult because a person is trying to navigate contradictory discourses and in the process is reconstructing her sense of self.

Nevertheless, the possibility of rejecting some positions and adopting others suggests that people can exercise agency and use discourses for their own purposes. This puts the individual in control and implies that change is at least theoretically possible. It is Burr's (1995) contention that *'this ability is in the nature of a skill, and therefore, in principle at least, could be improved, thereby increasing the agency of the individual'* (p93). When people do participate in resistant actions, they are *'part of a process of changing perceptions of experience and forming new subjectivities'* (Horsman:1990:23), as the challenge to the traditional motherhood discourse evidenced by the increased incidence of unmarried motherhood demonstrates. In

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Willig's (1999) view, *'social conditions do not directly determine human experience. Rather, they offer a range of possible ways of being which when taken up by social actors transform social life and the possibilities it offers in the future'* (p41). I think this is what Foucault means when he says that power is exercised rather than owned, and that resistance takes place at a local level, which in turn affects the whole network.

Not so very long ago unmarried motherhood was viewed as abnormal but, in constructionist terms, abnormal discourses are the very essence of social change. Abnormal discourses force a re-evaluation of taken-for-granted knowledge that has come to be accepted as foundational truth, offering the possibility of new spheres of action. In time change discourses themselves become part of the society's stock of taken-for-granted knowledge. Whilst unmarried motherhood is still not totally accepted nor the ideologically preferred context in which to rear children, there is no doubt that at the beginning of the twenty-first century it is seen as one among many contexts for childrearing.

Change emerges from what already exists, it is a construction resulting from joint action that builds on what is already there. As Burkitt (1999) remarks *'People do make history, but under conditions not entirely of their own making – and these conditions are there whether we like it or not ... the already existing structures are the means through which something new is authored'* (p75). But does this mean that existing structures are real? Herein lies one of the core dilemmas for constructionism.

Although it seems reasonable to say that constructionists would largely agree that *'social processes, particularly language, are central to everyday life and experience'* (Cromby & Nightingale:1999:6), that sociohistorical context is hugely influential and that discursive diversity makes change possible, this does not imply a cosy unanimity among constructionists. Bubbling away under the surface there are trouble spots, one of the most irritable of which concerns the concepts of realism and relativism and the way in which language is used.

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### **Realism-Relativism Debate**

Although there may be agreement that language is central to the constructionist perspective, the way in which language functions is controversial. Whereas in the positivist tradition language describes a pre-existing ontological reality, for constructionists language does not **describe** the world, it **actively constructs** it. However, we cannot '*construct the world any old way we choose*' (Cromby & Nightingale:1999:9) because words and concepts pre-date an individual's entry into the world. This is not to say that words and concepts **equating to** a material or social reality pre-date our entry into the world, rather it means that **previously negotiated meanings** for material and social 'things' pre-date our entry into the world. Thus, constructionism can neither '*affirm nor deny a world 'out there' beyond linguistic formulation*' (Burkitt:1999:76). Talk does not reflect actual existence; only the way in which things are jointly spoken of and understood in a particular social context at a particular historical time.

From being infants we learn to utilise, adopt and adapt our society's stock of concept usages in our understanding of the world and ourselves. This stock of previous usages stems from a world which existed and was experienced by others before we were born. It functions as our frame of reference, as a means of common understanding that enables us to have meaningful relationships with other people who share our language and culture. When we talk we construct and reconstruct the '*concepts, categories and objects with which we are familiar*' (Burr:1997:9).

One of the main difficulties of accepting language as the foundation of experience is that language comes to represent the limit of the world and as objective reality must also be described linguistically, it is difficult to state with certainty what that reality is or if it exists at all beyond language. Kenwood (1999) claims that constructionism's '*relativism and its openly implied rejection of the possibility of knowing objective reality and denial of even the possibility of truth are deeply problematic*' (p183). Because meaning is negotiated between people, language cannot represent an independent, unchanging world. Consequently, constructionists cannot lay claim to an independent material reality or truth.

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From a realist perspective there is an external world of physical, social and psychological objects which exists independently of people's representations; that is, there is more to the world than what people can say about it. In daily life people take it for granted that there is a real world out there, independent of thought, but at the same time people also claim that one's '*view of things depends on our perspective*' (Wetherell & Still:1998:99), that is – one's view of things is relative.

Take, for example, the word 'chair'. This is a previously negotiated linguistic usage applied to certain configurations of objects, but it does not mean that a **chair** has a fixed material reality. We could just as easily call this configuration a 'flubberdub', and providing that the majority of people used this term for this configuration of objects, then that is what the object would be understood as because '*words have only a use rather than a meaning*' (Osbeck:1993:341). Similarly, what my grandson – a dedicated Potterite – calls a magic wand for casting spells and mixing potions, I call a buttonhook for fastening boots and bodices. Is my construction any more real than his, both of us having negotiated a meaning for this object from our relative stocks of previously acquired knowledge? He hasn't encountered the word 'buttonhook' and its associated usage before; therefore my construction of this object doesn't exist, has no reality, for him. At best the veracity of a claim can only be decided **relative** to other claims, not by measuring it against some elemental truth.

This logic applies to social reality as well as material reality. If one thinks about the 2003 Iraq war as an example, the anti-war protestors in Britain and America could be construed as advocates of peace or as anti-western traitors, depending on one's point of view. In other words, there is no single ultimate truth, on this or any other subject, there are only differing versions of what appears to be real.

From the perspective of this study, is the reality concerning women's lives that they are destined to become wives and mothers? Certainly traditional feminine discourses would thus position women, and yet women are also single with children, married and childless, employees with or without husbands and children, to present but a few of the possible alternative constructions. Which of these constructions is the more real? Like one's stance on the Iraq war, it depends on one's point of view.

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Burr (1998) remarks that this relativist stance has been '*attacked as morally relative and a-political*' (p19), That is, in denying absolute truth all points of view must be respected equally; no one has the right to have their version of reality privileged over anyone else's. As Kenwood (1999) points out, this **seems** to be desirable and liberatory. If everyone's point of view is treated equally this should mean that the views of those who have traditionally had limited access to voice, such as women, are taken seriously. However, this line of reasoning also privileges discourses such as racism and sexism, which has to be problematic.

Burr (1997) suggests taking into account '*facilitative or liberating*' (p9) effects as a way of judging between different representations. Kenwood (1999) agrees that some kind of distinction is necessary because, '*in an interdependent world, what people say and do has real consequences for themselves and others*' (p184). It is hardly reasonable to privilege both the oppressor and the oppressed at the same time. Osbeck (1993) suggests that 'usefulness to society' might be a way of evaluating discourses and discusses Harre's concept of discourse being person-constructing and sustaining. To be person-constructing and sustaining, people must enter into interaction as equal partners. Thus, discourses of racism and sexism, would be evaluated as less than person-constructing and sustaining because people from different positions could not enter into interaction as equal partners and the relative positions of the parties has negative consequences for one group over the another.

For all the above are appealing suggestions of ways in which to evaluate between discourses, the problem is, who decides what constitutes facilitative, liberatory, usefulness, or person-constructing and sustaining, as whatever criteria are used will themselves stem from the speaker's own sociohistorical context, and besides, having fixed criteria, or saying that one discourse is superior to another, is decidedly anti-constructionist. Gergen (1988) maintains that constructionists should '*establish no transcendent grounds for eliminating any theoretical formulation [because] to eradicate a theoretical perspective would not only be tantamount to losing a mode of human intelligibility ... but to silence a community of meaning making*'.

By taking this extreme relativist position, Gergen has been criticised for advocating an 'anything goes' stance, a criticism he is well aware of. He notes, '*In its rampant*

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*relativism, it is said, constructionist theory lacks moral or ethical commitment, it offers no reason for rejecting the most vile and inhumane actions. Its "anything goes" mentality seems morally bankrupt, even repulsive', (IR9). However difficult these criticisms are, Gergen continues to advocate his stance on the basis that 'there is a place for all entries into intelligibility, even those that would militate against constructionism itself' (IR10).*

Of course, in constructionist style, Gergen's stance is but one construction, and perhaps this is what he is saying, that his version is not more valid than anyone else's. This is perhaps illustrated by the fact that Osbeck (1993) is uncomfortable with Gergen's extreme relativism. As far as Osbeck is concerned, there has to be some way in which to evaluate cultural practices. However, by evaluating between discourses one, in effect, positions oneself as judge of particular cultural practices, thereby elevating one perspective over another, which is also problematic. On the other hand, by not evaluating between discourses, constructionism '*offers no logically defensible means by which cultural practices can be seen as in need of efforts to direct social change*' (Osbeck:1993:347).

From Gergen's perspective then, constructionism must be inherently and exclusively relativistic, whereas for Osbeck there must be some means for evaluating between discourses. Leaving aside the question of personal power, which of course it is almost impossible to do, one might say that taking a constructionist position does not mean that anything goes, it means that everything is contingent, it does not mean that there are no rules, it means that the rules are historically and culturally situated and people decide jointly which practices to claim as their own and which to resist.

### **Summary**

From the point of view of this study, taking a social constructionist perspective suggests that a woman's aspirations and expectations are joint constructions, grounded in particular historical and cultural contexts and related discourses, rather than the result of individual free choice. Consequently it will be necessary to examine the socio-historical context and discourses surrounding the mature and teenage women's learning experiences. It will also be necessary to identify the ways in which the mature and teenage women are positioned within these discourses in an

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attempt to discover how their positioning may have influenced their aspirational/expectational development. Similarly it will be necessary to determine if the mature and teenage women have reflected on these discourses, read them against the grain, as a means of accounting for discursive accommodation and resistance.

Finally, I need to make my own position clear regarding the evaluation of discourses. I am uneasy accepting that all discourses are equally valid and am inclined to follow Burr's (1997) suggestion of determining how facilitative and liberatory a discourse is. The way I understand this is to ask – does the discourse help women to understand their options and the consequences of taking up some positions rather than others, is it helpful rather than damaging to women's sense of self and life options?

Of course there are implications to taking this stance, by doing so I am privileging my own voice, and whatever evaluations I put forward can only ever be my constructions, developed from my personal contexts. These are difficult issues and the best that I can say – following Freedman & Combs (1996) – is that as you read this account, you take it not as a truth claim but as '*preliminary reports in progress*' (p18), that you read my construction of the mature and teenage women's accounts as facilitative and liberating, possibly through reflecting on your own experiences and positioning yourself as adding to and changing the discourses.

This seems to have occurred as my critical readers have gone through the draft thesis. For example, in giving me feedback, Reader 1 says that on reflection she has a '*sense of succumbing to feminine discourse*' herself, that she can now position her own journey but feels, '*in retrospect, it should have led me to greater things if I had realised/been aware*'. Reader 2 commented that reading the thesis has enabled her to reflect on her own positioning and how her positioning impacts on her children.

In the next chapter I will discuss the substantive concepts of aspirations and expectations and how these concepts have been understood and investigated in the past.

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## **Chapter Two**

### **Conceptual Focus:**

### **Aspirational and Expectational Development**

*It is always difficult, when we look back with our minds, to be sure of a time when things became different, when a current darkened or brightened, when words or glances changed the mood.*

(Unsworth: Morality Play)

#### **Introduction**

As a child I fleetingly thought that when I left school I would like to be a teacher. Was this an aspiration or an expectation? Although these terms are often used interchangeably, Pollard & Tann (1993) believe that, regardless of the inherent difficulties, an attempt should be made to distinguish between them. In this chapter I will examine some of the institutions, economic processes and social relations which may play a part in the discursive formation that facilitates an articulation of the concept of women's aspirations and expectations (Foucault:1972).

#### **Aspirations and Expectations**

Dictionary definitions relating to aspirations include: earnest desire, rise high, motive, objective, ambition, purpose, intention and pipe-dream, and those relating to expectations include: anticipation, probability, regard as likely, assume as future event, destiny, belief, intention, fate, expected thing. From these definitions I would say that aspirations are understood as things that people strive for, things they most desire and dream about. Fletcher (IR6) suggests that aspirations may develop through a process of positive visualisation whereby a person constructs a 'possible self' in which she is someone other than her now self, that is she constructs her self as a person who has achieved her desired goal. Positive visualisation enables a person to make plans and take action towards achieving her aspirations.



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Expectations, on the other hand, are those things that are considered highly likely to happen. Visualisation works here too – but in a negative direction. There is almost a sense of fatalism here, as if one cannot change the inevitable.

Taking up definitions of this kind, Bould & Hopson (1983) suggest that whilst individuals might begin with aspirations, with dreams and fantasies, as they progress through school aspirations become *'inextricably linked with their expectations, a compromise between fantasy and reality'* (p134). This compromise is based on what the individual believes to be the possibilities and limitations available in a particular geographical location and historical time. Similarly, although admittedly speaking from a strong male perspective, Spencer (1972) is of the view that young people quickly replace *'any fantasy aspirations by job preferences which are entirely realistic'* (p2), based on their perceived ability and skills, and Sutherland (1983) notes that girls do not seem to have high aspirations, a situation society accepts unquestioningly.

These definitions provide some idea of what aspirations and expectations are generally accepted to be, but they present no indication of how aspirations and expectations develop, how they are constructed. As my purpose is to examine the discursive formation relating to aspirational/expectational development, the question is – where do I start?

Whether one is talking about a most desired thing or something that is likely to happen – whatever that 'thing' is, it is constructed by discourse. A discourse is a system of representation, by which Foucault meant *'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment'* (Hall:2001:72). Thus discourse constructs the topic, it allows certain things to be talked about in relation to the topic, and disallows others. For example, in the early 1950s it would have been difficult for working-class women to talk about 'career' aspirations because such talk would have required a discursive formation in which the construct – female career aspirations – could have meaning. This construct did not exist for working-class women when I was a child, a time when most women were expected to become wives and mothers. If there was no discourse for it at that time, there does appear to be a discourse today

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– so what has brought about this change? Foucault stresses the importance of the historical and cultural context and suggests that *'radical breaks, ruptures and discontinuities'* (Hall:2001:75) facilitate change across time periods.

In the timescale of the women in this study (1950-2000), Beck (1994) identifies 1989 as a major discontinuity. This was the year that the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, the culmination of the revolutionary changes that had been sweeping across Eastern Europe. Throughout the Soviet bloc, reformers assumed power and ended 40 years of communist rule. This discontinuity leads Giddens (1991 & 1994) and Beck (1994) to theorise on a change in the social order, to differentiate between traditional and post-traditional social orders, post-traditional society is also referred to as reflexive modernity, and high/late modern society. In the thesis I will use the terms traditional and post-traditional social orders as a means of differentiating the two groups of participants.

Giddens (1994) says of traditional society that it is *'bound up with memory, specifically ... 'collective memory'; is connected with ... formulaic notions of truth; has 'guardians'; and ... binding force which has a combined moral and emotional content ... the past is not preserved but continuously reconstructed on the basis of the present. Such reconstruction is partially individual, but more fundamentally it is social or collective'* (p63). By contrast, in post-traditional society the *'sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge'* (Giddens:1991:2-3), this is a society in which *'the protective framework of the small community and of tradition'* (p33) have been broken down and replaced by larger, impersonal organisations.

Beck (1994) suggests that post-traditional society, through its dynamism and choice, is *'undercutting its foundations of class, stratum, occupation, sex roles, nuclear family'* (p2) etc. In this post-traditional society the individual is confronted with and forced to choose between multiple lifestyle choices without the benefit of being able to turn to tradition for advice and guidance. One can argue that people have always had choices in their day-to-day affairs, but in traditional society established norms restricted life choices within relatively set channels, whereas in post-traditional society, the individual is confronted with *'a complex diversity of choices and,*

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*because it is non-foundational, at the same time offers little help as to which options should be selected'* (Giddens:1991:80). In the oral histories presented in Chapters 4 – 11, the mature and teenage women provide numerous examples of restricted and multiple choices in terms of life options.

Indeed, taking traditional and post-traditional social orders to be demarcated by the year 1989, the mature women in this study – as well as myself – can be located in a traditional social order at the time of their birth and the teenage women can be located in a post-traditional social order at the time of their birth. From this perspective, what institutions, economic processes and social relations – i.e. what discursive formation – has impacted on their aspirations and expectations?

There is no precise or correct starting point for this journey of discovery, travellers step on the path at various locations. I will use the clues flagged up earlier in Bould & Hopson (1983), Spencer (1972) and Sutherland's (1983) discussion of skills and abilities and realistic possibilities and limitations as my stepping on point.

I failed my eleven-plus examination, an outcome that affected my aspirations in a major way, but did I fail my eleven-plus because I lacked ability? Was my childhood dream of becoming a teacher an aspiration or an unrealistic fantasy? Did I begin my working life in a factory because this was the most realistic possibility available to me, given my abilities and the time and area in which I lived?

### **Skills & Abilities**

In 1971, Ferri remarked that, *'Pupils hopes and ambitions ... are likely to be influenced to a large extent by what they feel about their capabilities and limitations'* (p47), and that, because of this, increasing attention was being paid to young people's skills and abilities. In fact, investigations into the way people think about their capabilities and limitations had been prevalent for some years prior to this in the form of achievement motivation and attribution theory, although it should be noted, as Paludi (1992) does most forcefully, and as I have mentioned in the Introduction, that much of this early work was almost universally male-centred.

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In 1958, Heider hypothesised that generally, people attribute success to internal causes of ability and effort, and failure to an external cause of luck. The decisions people make about their success and failure have a powerful effect on how they approach future tasks. For example, if I attribute success to high ability, then I will be motivated to try new, more difficult, tasks. Even if I failed, I am likely to attribute this failure to lack of effort on this occasion and believe that if I increase my effort next time I will be successful. On the other hand, if I attribute failure to lack of ability it is unlikely that I will be motivated to try similar tasks again. Even if I am successful, I am likely to attribute this success to good luck rather than ability, which means that to attempt such a task again would be pointless because I don't have the ability, and luck can't last forever.

An example of how attribution theory might be linked to aspirational development lies in my own experience. My abilities were measured by the eleven-plus selection test and pupils like me who failed this test were generally considered to be the '*least successful members of a meritocratic society*' (Ferri:1971:54) and consequently had the lowest of all young people's aspirations. Believing I lacked ability, and having this belief repeatedly reinforced by the education system, it seemed pointless for me to continue entertaining aspirations of becoming a teacher. Thus my aspirations were replaced by more realistic expectations of what my future life would be like.

A further dimension of attribution theory is the way in which attributions are correlated with sex differences. For example, in Licht & Dweck's (1987) work, girls are reported as displaying less confidence in their ability than boys, a pattern that persists '*despite the fact that girls consistently perform as well, if not better than, boys*' (p72). From an attribution theory perspective, girls are more likely to attribute their failures to lack of ability, whereas boys attribute their failures to lack of effort. But the differences go deeper than this, when girls do succeed they are more likely to attribute their success to luck rather than to ability.

In addition to attributions, Horner (1974) looked at women's motivation to achieve and introduced the 'motive to avoid success' construct. She found that men and women have equal motivation to achieve academically, but women also feel a conflicting motive to avoid success, because '*academic success will interfere with*

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*their social existence*' (Women and Achievement Motivation IR21), i.e. academic success will make them less desirable to men. Horner maintains that women, and bright women in particular, are caught in a double bind, worrying about success and failure – '*If she fails, she is not living up to her own standards of performance; if she succeeds she is not living up to societal expectations about the female role*' (IR14). Horner adds that although many structural barriers to women's achievement are being removed, women's psychological barriers are still a problem that affects their aspirations, i.e. lacking belief in their ability and keeping more than a weather eye on their social success, they do not set themselves high aspirations, preferring instead to keep '*in line with society's stereotype of what females should be*' (Licht & Dweck:1983:77).

Subsequent research, such as that of Levine & Crumrine (1975), has found replication of Horner's work problematic. Levine & Crumrine indicate that there were methodological problems in the original work and conclude, '*There may well be a motive to avoid success. So far, its existence remains unproven*' (p972). Similarly, Furlong (1986) remarks that the '*contradictory nature of the evidence must cast doubt upon the usefulness of the concept in understanding the narrowness of women's aspirations*' (p370). Paludi (1992) explains that, in the original work, Horner employed an amended version of the Thematic Appreciation Test (TAT). Instead of using a picture her stimulus was the sentence, '*After first term finals [name] finds [him/herself] at the top of [his/her] medical school class*' (Women and Achievement Motivation IR21). Women were given an *Anne* sentence; men were given a *John* sentence. Paludi (1992) suggests that depicting an *Anne* at the top of a medical school class was to position her in an inappropriate gender role, thus giving rise to criticisms of lack of methodological robustness.

Wetherell *et al* (1987) comment on other problems inherent in Horner's work. Firstly they suggest that there is little support for the assumption that '*traits predict performance*' independent of context and situation, and secondly that men and women cannot be seen as '*separate internally homogenous groups with respect to the demarcating trait – fear of success*' (p59). In Wetherell *et al*'s (1987) view, fear of success cannot be reliably linked to sex, rather one must also consider the context and the meaning this context has for the individual.

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Despite these criticisms, the 'fear of success' construct and 'double-bind' hypothesis have been influential threads in research concerning women's aspirations. Oakley (1972), for example, considers that the double-bind hypothesis is *'a result of the conflict of two disparate roles'* (p88), the role of academic achievement requiring independence and the role of femininity that requires dependence. Spender (1982) illustrates this academic/feminine conflict in noting how girls *'pretended they were dumb in the presence of boys who "mattered" and expressed the sentiment that "it doesn't pay for girls to be too bright"'* (p81). Similarly, Osborne (1991) suggests that, *'In order to seem more feminine, many women ... disguise their abilities and withdraw from competitive situations'* (p8) altogether.

The above discussion illustrates that one of the institutions instrumental in women's aspirational/expectational development is education, in that from a very early age it influences girls' perceptions of their ability.

It would be gratifying to think that education is concerned with equality of opportunity and meritocracy, with encouraging all pupils to achieve their full potential, but in fact, education is largely concerned with power and control, with *'regulation, surveillance, subordination, [and] transformation of desire into publicly acceptable forms ... Next to the family, it is society's major vehicle to ensure the submission of desire to its own favoured forms of happiness, subject to its own rationality and ideology'* (Gibson:1986:120).

Deem (1978) remarks that the *'achievement of equal education by women is something incompatible with the present culture'* (p20), and Stanworth (1983) concurs, saying it is a myth that schools operate as impartial meritocracies. The reality is that schools favour the already privileged on the basis of race, gender and socio-economic background, not on ability.

The 1944 Education Act is the first piece of educational legislation that has a direct impact on the mature women in this study, myself included. Its stated purpose was to provide every child with an education appropriate to his/her aptitude and ability. The difficulty lies in who decides which aptitudes and abilities are desirable and what the criteria for assessment are. French (1990) illustrates one facet of an inequitable

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education system in remarking that *'the most widespread injustice, which has affected the largest number of children, was the setting of a higher pass mark for girls than for boys in the eleven-plus examination'* (p5). What this meant was that girls could perform better than boys, but be awarded lower marks and thus be denied a grammar school education. The rationale here was that girls weren't destined for higher education and careers therefore they did not need an elite grammar school education, whereas boys did, which in effect means that the 1944 educational reorganisation into grammar, technical and secondary modern schools was premised on inequality. Thus it becomes clear that historically situated educational discourse had a direct bearing on depressing the aspirations of many women of my generation.

During the 1970s selection testing had all but disappeared and the majority of pupils attended comprehensive schools which were heralded as a means of *'ending class and ability distinctions in education'* (Deem:1978:62). Whether this was achieved or not is, of course, relative and depends on one's point of view.

The 1980s and 90s witnessed an intense backlash against comprehensive organisation on the grounds that it reduced everyone to mediocrity and that it did nothing to stretch bright pupils. Taking the place of comprehensive rhetoric came the market economy and personal choice discourses. The implementation of market reforms *'is essentially a class strategy which has as one of its major effects the reproduction of relative social class (and ethnic) advantages and disadvantages'* (Ball:1993:4 - emphasis in original).

In the market economy of post-traditional society, parents become 'customers' and schools 'sell' education like any other commodity. In this climate, families without material resources and those who lack cultural capital are designated 'poor choosers' and consequently 'bad parents'. From this perspective, bad choices are not the system's fault; they are parents' fault. In this way, middle-class parents have regained their advantageous educational position which had been threatened by *'the increasing social democratic de-differentiation of schools, the cultural reform of the curriculum ... and the diversion of resources to those with greatest learning needs and difficulties'* (Ball:1993:16). Thus one construction of market economy-style

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education is that it raises middle-class aspirations and depresses working-class aspirations, and that those who do not succeed have only themselves to blame.

Whether educational practices depresses female aspirations is now a hotly debated question because one of the major educational changes of the 1990s is the positioning of girls as educational achievers; girls having passed boys in all examinations, including traditionally male subjects such as maths. Thus an emerging female achievement discourse is seen as contributing to a change in girls' aspirations and sense of self.

In the traditional society of the mature women, education served to prepare the majority of young women for a domestic role and possibly a short-term gendered occupational role, whereas in post-traditional society, most girls are now gaining qualifications that are as good as, if not better than, boys. On the premise that good qualifications lead to good jobs, girls' aspirations have risen, which may have implications for female roles, for occupational demographics and the structure of family and society as it has previously been constituted.

### **Realistic Possibilities and Limitations**

The second area of influence on aspirational/expectational development I noted at the beginning of this chapter is realistic possibilities and limitations, which constitute aspects of institutional influences such as the family, as well as economic processes and social relations. Douglas, Ross & Simpson (1968) maintain that young peoples' aspirations are *'to a large extent moulded by the people they meet and the kind of employment open to them in the area where they live'* (p99) and Furlong (1986) remarks that young people absorb information about the possibilities available to them from *'their experiences within social structures such as the family, the peer group and the school'* (p374). As I have discussed aspects of educational experience in the previous section, I will now turn to family experiences.

The way girls view their future lives is strongly influenced by parental – particularly maternal – role models (Marini:1978). For example, the parental division of domestic and occupational labour and attitudes concerning this labour influence a girl's perception of what it is appropriate for women to do.



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A portrait of the traditional family presents an employed father supporting a dependent wife and children, all of whom live together in a home that is a haven of peace and security. In this discourse the quality of the nation is dependent on the quality of the family, i.e. resident, employed fathers provide positive role models for boys, and full-time mothers provide emotional stability and positive role models for girls, these are beneficial role models in that they are said to prevent juvenile delinquency and criminality. Hakim (1996) notes that this ideal was *'more often aspired to than achieved by working class families, as it relied on the husband having adequate and regular earnings'* (p124). Nevertheless, this family form, the nuclear family, has come to be considered the natural form and, by extension, so too has role differentiation and the mother-child bond. This construction of the traditional family has been particularly influential in depressing women's career aspirations, leading them almost imperceptibly to expectations of the domestic life as their natural sphere.

However, in post-traditional society girls are presented with an array of lifestyle choices. Although ideologically, girls know that society expects them to be at home, particularly when they have children, at the same time, with their educational achievements and examples of other working women around them and role models of career women presented through the media, they also know that occupational aspirations are equally valid for them.

Young women today have to make choices that previous generations of women were less subject to, but whilst these choices can be very confusing and contradictory, they can also provide a context for change. As Gaskell (1983) notes, the solutions to the contradictions that each new generation faces are not predetermined, and the very fact that solutions are not predetermined can be viewed as positive in that it opens up the possibility of change.

In addition to family and educational experiences, local employment opportunities also play their part in aspirational/expectational development.

In the mid-1960s, there was an expectation that working-class women would take up employment when they first left school in offices, shops and factories, and that was

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what the majority of us did, I worked in a factory when I left school. Using census data, Price & Bain (1988) show that in 1966 the occupational sectors with the highest concentration of female employees were the clerical and sales sectors. They also note that in 1966, 73.59% of **single** women aged 15-24 and 85.52% of single women aged 25-34 were employed (p172). However, taking the age range 15-34 as being that when most women are likely to marry and have children, **married** female employment figures in 1966 look considerably different. In the 15-24 age range the percentage employed is 43.5% and in the 25-34 age range it is 34.34% (p172)<sup>1</sup>.

It would be relatively simple to say that marriage and children prevent women from working. But of course it is not that simple, there are a great many factors that operate to position women in the domestic sphere and to influence their thinking regarding the intersection of motherhood and employment. Take social attitudes for example, whilst it is generally acceptable for a woman with no children to be employed outside the home, as Dex (1988) observes from a study of social attitudes conducted in 1965, *'approximately three-quarters of women thought [a mother] should stay at home'* (p28) if she has children under school age.

Combining with social attitudes, there used to be a marriage bar in many occupational spheres – teaching and the armed forces, for example – wherein a woman had to resign her employment upon marriage. Hakim (1996) notes that the *'abolition of the marriage bar for women allowed them to remain in their jobs after marriage, typically until the first birth'* (p61). But again, with the advent of the first child many women resigned their employment. Thus, the good wife and mother discourse exerts powerful influence on women to be full-time wives and mothers and even in the early 1970s, Musgrave (1972) was advising married women to think very carefully about their domestic arrangements if they wanted to take up employment. A husband's long or irregular hours, or negative attitudes about female employment would make it impossible for her to work outside the home. And even if she does work, she must not neglect her domestic duties; these are still her responsibility. A husband might 'help', if his job and temperament incline him this way, but

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<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include widowed and divorced women for whom Price & Bain's (1988) employed figures are: 1966 (15-24) 58.33%, (25-34) 65.96%

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*'discretion and tact are of paramount importance if the husband is not to feel that he is paying too high a price for his wife's outside life'* (Musgrave:1972:83). One can only speculate on the emotional conflict this advice might have had on young women who wanted to work outside the home at this time.

At the end of the 1970s, Hoffman (1979) suggests that maternal employment was becoming the norm, gone were the days when a woman's employment was terminated with her first child. This seems to be born out by Price & Bain's (1988) figures for 1981, where – taking the same age range as for 1966 – the number of **married** women in employment in the 15-24 age range had increased to 53.65% and in the 25-34 age range it had risen to 48.36%. A decade later Machung (1989) reported that women's career aspirations were rising and Furlong (1986) suggests that as more women work they will contribute to the labour market expectations of the next generation and as more women hold positions of authority, this too will contribute to the status aspirations of the next generation.

Looking at the 1990s, it is difficult to make direct comparisons with earlier decades if for no other reasons than that family and employment structures have changed so considerably over the last 30-40 years. In this post-traditional society, 'married' is no longer a useful designation by which to determine the levels of maternal employment, and the majority of young people no longer enter employment at 15 years of age. Bearing this caution in mind, Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) (1999) data for Britain in 1999 suggests that 74% of all married or cohabiting women are economically active and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) (1996) speculate that the *'economic activity rate of women of working age (16 to 59 years) ... will continue to rise ... to 75.2 per cent by the year 2006'* (p4).

During the late 80s, early 90s, employers began to take an interest in retaining female employees, including women with children. One might argue that employers were keen to retain women because of an anticipated skills shortage. One might also argue that employers were keen to retain women, particularly married women, because in this period of ever deepening economic recession, these women provided the cheapest form of labour available. Rather than suggesting employment equality and stability, what the above figures of female employment growth mask is the fact

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that the major part of this growth is accounted for by part-time work, where part-time work is seen as flexible and short-term, rather than because it is more suited to women's domestic needs.

There are many reasons for this growth in part-time female employment. Hakim (1996) cites aspects of the 1980s economic recession, the loss of male jobs in manufacturing, engineering, mining and shipbuilding, together with the growth in technology and service sectors which tend to offer part-time, low paid employment. Whatever explanation one adopts, *'Suddenly industry is interested in childcare initiatives and flexible working hours to enable mothers of young children to remain in employment. Thus the rhetoric concerning employed mothers conveniently shifts to take account of market forces'* (Lewis:1991:197), just as it had done during and after the Second World War.

Where the popular media image of the power-dressed female executive may just conceivably have impacted positively on female aspirational development, it is unlikely that the low-paid, low-skilled, part-time female employee conveyed a similar message. It is more likely that many women expected this type of employment based on their understanding of recession, unemployment and the limited employment opportunities available to them in their area.

By the late 1990s, economic recession is not so strident an aspect of the British economy and women's educational achievements and aspirations continue to rise, a situation that some view as problematic. Roberts (1995), for example, feels that, as a result of all social classes having absorbed the success ideology, young people's ambitions have outstripped actual employment opportunities. One of the biggest problems is that because the majority of young people now gain qualifications, whereas they used to aspire to good jobs, now they expect good jobs. Unfortunately these expectations may well be dashed because there simply aren't enough good jobs to go round.

The discussion so far has highlighted ways in which the institutions of the family and education, and economic and employment processes construct women's aspirations and expectations. However, in addition to these there is what I consider

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to be an almost foundational discursive layer made up of femininity, romance, marriage and motherhood, discourses that enable women to say and do certain things and not others, a layer that is not usually present in male-centred research, but which must be explored if any meaningful attempt is to be made to determine how **women's** aspirations and expectations are constructed.

### **Feminine, Romance, Marriage and Motherhood Discourses**

Traditionally, femininity served as a '*pattern of conduct to the growing girl [that] influences her life plan, and so contributes in shaping her character*' (Klein:1946:1971:163). Kitzinger & Wilkinson (1996), quoting from de Beauvoir (1953), note that '*Woman is defined as Other to a male norm*' (p3), that man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him. Because maleness is normative, femaleness as Other is '*constructed as inferior or abnormal*' (Kitzinger & Wilkinson:1996:4), and Walkerdine (1989) remarks that femininity is a discursive production that is '*antithetical to masculine rationality*' (p268). What, then, does femaleness consist of and how should a woman conduct herself?

At various times female traits have been said to include emotionalism, vulnerability, passivity, submissiveness, modesty, childishness, hysteria, limited memory, lack of logic and lack of competence (Fausto-Sterling:1985), amongst others. Whilst personality traits were once considered to be innate and fixed attributes of the individual, these traits have come to be seen as social constructs. That personality traits are not innate, that they are subject to change can be illustrated by the argument that as women take on masculine functions such as paid employment, they develop masculine traits such as assertiveness and decisiveness. Klein (1946:1971) argues that such acquisitions demonstrate that these traits '*are not the effect of innate sex characters but of the social role and are changing with it*' (p170). Regardless of this shift in opinion, Whitehead (1994) contends that the stereotyping of female traits and their stultifying consequences persists. As a result women experience conflict between, for example, the demands of femininity, which requires submissiveness, and the desire for achievement, which requires assertiveness. That is, in expressing career aspirations women are displaying masculine traits that are at odds with femininity.

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Bernard (1975) is of the opinion that traditionally, dependency has been the touchstone of femininity and has determined a woman's role. Because a girl was expected to transfer her dependency from a father to a husband, her main aim in life was to find a man and get married. Socialised dependency is so ingrained that it seems natural and most women do not realise the extent to which they are subject to male control. Consequently, resistance to feminine discourses is rarely part of women's vocabulary, even though dependency leads them to downplay their skills and abilities for fear of frightening off potential partners.

It is only by understanding what constitutes femininity and its prime directive of finding a husband that one is able to understand the invidious importance of femininity's supporting cast: romance and marriage.

In traditional western society romantic love was the route by which most women arrived at the socially sanctioned destination of marriage. Although in post-traditional society marriage may no longer be the only destination, Middleton (1987) describes how, in bedrooms all over the country, teenage women continue to absorb the gloss and glitz of romantic love from TV, radio, records and 'love' magazines. In order to 'secure' a man as soon as possible, (to paraphrase Austen (1813:1978)), whether marriage is a goal or not, girls are bombarded with 'advice' on how to be slim, pretty and attractive to men.

In thinking about the nature of romantic love, one would suppose it to be a private, individual experience. And yet, as Allan (1993) states, *'no matter how it is experienced, love is a social construction, and one into which a great deal of cultural 'work' is crammed'* (p17). All forms of media present blueprints for successful relationships; in addition, parents, friends and siblings add pressure through their sanction or disapproval of various relationships, where the sanction can cause as much pressure as disapproval. The various parties are pursuing their vested interests, their power and control; the media to sell their products; parents, friends and siblings to exercise voice and control over who, in their view, is compatible with the needs and behaviours of their social group.

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Davies (1992) says that romance is dangerous because it positions women in socially approved roles such as dependent wife and mother in order to control them and to reproduce the social status quo, and yet women appear to voluntarily take up the subordinate position by searching for a prince who will lead them to happy domestic bliss.

To avoid the pitfalls, women need to understand how the romance discourse draws them in and positions them within its own terms, that is, the prince will care for and protect the woman if she agrees to do his bidding. There is no opportunity for female self-actualisation in this script. Women need to consider alternative story lines that are not as destructive as the romantic story, stories that enable them to achieve their own potential.

In Lees (1989) work, there are girls who do seem to be aware of alternative scripts. These girls want careers and realise that *'relationships with boys might upset their intentions and therefore steered clear of them'* (p29). They base their decisions on what they have observed happening to their mothers. In other words, these girls do see what life is like after the fairytale wedding and whose job it is to clean the toilet, a task that cannot be construed as romantic no matter how much in love one is!

But these girls are the minority; the majority do want to marry. As with romantic love, marriage is thought of as a private, individual matter, whereas, as Allan (1993) remarks, *'marriage is patterned by social conventions and material relations that lie well outside the domain of individual couples'* (p16). For example, marriage provides a socially sanctioned context for raising children, and marital status has implications regarding tax laws, property ownership, benefit payments, pension and inheritance arrangements etc.

The traditional marriage model of male breadwinner, dependent female homemaker and child-carer has become the modal pattern, a pattern which feminists claim constitutes a major site of female oppression, forcing women into a subordinate and servicing role and existing *'to sustain the dominance of men'* (Finch & Morgan:1991:63). Regardless of the normative nature of the traditional model, marriage has changed. The 1950s and 60s, for example, saw the development of

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'companionate' marriage (Finch & Summerfield:1991), a model that stressed *'friendship and a shared domestic and emotional life'* (Richards & Elliott:1991:p33). However, in practice shared never meant equal. As I mentioned on pp59-60, during this period women increased their labour force participation, and at the same time they also retained the major responsibility for domestic and childcare tasks, while men's role remained much the same. While men may have stayed in the house more, they didn't extend their contribution to the domestic workload to any great extent.

Whilst the 1960s and 70s were decades of intense feminist pressure for equality in all spheres of women's lives, decades in which 'permissive' legislation made contraception, abortion and divorce more readily available, by contrast the 1980s was a decade of fierce right-wing backlash against these feminist demands. The concept of a 'backlash' is important because, as Delamont (2003) notes, *'There are never backlashes against ideas that are thought trivial: counter-arguments are lodged against ideas thought to be powerful'* (p35) and potentially conflictual. In many ways the new legislations were seen as threatening the existing social order.

By the 1980s a moral right-wing was claiming that feminist demands regarding the family constituted a threat to social stability and male power and subsequently worked to shift female priorities back to the wife and mother role. They did not go so far as to advocate *'women's expulsion from the labour market'* (Campbell:1987:159), how could they when so many women – including female conservative voters – were employees, when the economy was coming to depend on female labour, rather they advocated the family as a *'moral bulwark against degeneracy and dependence, and as [an] economic barricade against the state'* (Campbell:1987:159). These latter features relate to the 'problems' of lone mothers and welfare dependency. In this sense the good woman discourse continues to emphasise traditional marriage as the only acceptable way in which to raise children, an emphasis that is at odds with the diversity of lifestyle choices available to women in post-traditional society.

In talking of marriage it is almost impossible not to talk of motherhood, after all, the principle reason women marry is in order to become mothers – is it not?



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Traditional motherhood discourse suggests that all women aspire to become mothers, and to become mothers within the context of conventional marriage. Greenglass & Devins (1982) remark that in western society motherhood has been regarded as a full-time job: *'As recently as the 1950s, social pressure and prevailing norms prevented many women from seeking outside employment when they did not have to work for financial reasons'* (p57). In other words, good mothers commit themselves full-time to their children, whereas women who consider their own needs first are bad mothers, (Oakley:1981a). For a mother to work outside the home is to be unnatural and to *'deviate from the socially constructed ideal'* (Lewis:1991:196). Indeed, even in post-traditional society, women who deviate from this ideal are blamed for *'problems of child development, delinquency, marital breakdown and breakdown of the traditional nuclear family'* (Lewis:1991:196).

Childcare experts such as Bowlby (1965) warned mothers that irreparable damage would be done to children who were left whilst their mothers went out to work, a message taken up and widely disseminated by the media, a message that created enormous guilt in young women, especially those who had no choice but to work for financial reasons. Whether depressed and frustrated mothers were bad for a child's development doesn't seem to have been an issue, of more importance was the control of women in the home. Tizard (1991) remarks that one of the consequences of Bowlby's concept of 'mother-child attachment' was that the use of nursery provision would also cause developmental damage to children. Thus, just as maternal deprivation theory was taken up by both professionals and the public to position women in the home, so policy makers *'seized upon the implications of [Bowlby's] writings for the employment of women'* (Tizard:1991:181), the result being that the availability of adequate nursery provision that would enable women to take up paid employment has been a long and continuing battle in this country.

All the messages that combine in the motherhood discourse result in the majority of women expecting childcare to be their personal responsibility, and if they waver in this expectation they will soon find it *'reinforced by external pressures imposed ... by husbands, mothers, mothers-in-law, and friends'* (Ginsberg:1976), a woman will find that if she persists in working outside the home, she cannot expect domestic help from anyone else.

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And yet, regardless of the persistent strength of the traditional motherhood discourse, women's workforce participation has steadily increased during the time frame covered by this study. As a result, motherhood is being reconstructed, and a 'modern' motherhood discourse – or what Hakim (1996) refers to as '*the modern family division of labour*' (p206) has developed wherein no one form of mothering is privileged over others. This does not mean that any form of mothering goes. In many respects modern motherhood merely re-presents much of what has gone before. In post-traditional society it is accepted that mothers work outside the home, but it is still the case that motherhood should ideally take place within a married, nuclear family consisting of co-resident, heterosexual parents, and that mothers of pre-school children should be at home.

However, the development of modern marriage has not prevented the traditional nuclear family from becoming isolated as alternative family forms become more prominent in post-traditional society, even though these new forms continue to excite criticism from many quarters. For example, Phoenix & Woollett (1991) remark that women who '*give birth in their teenage years, mothers who are employed outside the home and women bringing up children on their own*' (p15) are all censured because they are perceived to be the cause of social problems such as the decline of the family, the erosion of male authority, increased juvenile delinquency and the development and reproduction of a benefit-dependent underclass, (Mann & Roseneil:1999).

It is possible to read the public outcry against single mothers as yet another facet of the right-wing backlash against 1960s/70s permissiveness and feminism, but that would be too simplistic, there are more powerful interests at stake here. One concerns the erosion of male power, but another is economic and relates to the spiralling cost of state benefits being paid to an increasing number of lone mothers. Lone mothers, regardless of how they arrived at that status, are seen as a drain on the public purse, they are creating a welfare-dependent underclass, a situation that has dire consequences for the future of society.

Thus much of the traditional motherhood discourse remains active in the modern motherhood discourse. There is perhaps one exception, with modern motherhood

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there is the suggestion that women can *'fulfil all the demands of full-time exclusive mothering and full-time paid work, without modifying the demands of either'* (Lewis:1991:195). What this implies is a process of female role expansion and an acceptance of female employment. However, as Oakley (1974b) remarks *'Employment does not itself alter the status (or reduce the work) of being a housewife'* (p6). Domestic and childcare tasks will only be reduced if her partner – if there is one – chooses to contribute to them, which is reminiscent of Ginsberg's (1976) comments that a wife should not **expect** any domestic help if she engages in paid employment.

### **Summary**

I have defined aspirations as the things women strive for and expectations as the things most likely to happen. From a social constructionist perspective aspirations and expectations are constructions, brought into being and articulated through a discursive formation made up of many threads; e.g. institutions such as the family and education, economic processes such as recession and unemployment and social relations such as marriage and motherhood.

What makes a woman strive after particular aspirations, or accept seemingly inevitable expectations? This is a complex question to which there are no straightforward answers. I have argued that perceptions concerning skills and abilities, possibilities and limitations are at least surface level indicators of how aspirations and expectations may develop. Digging deeper I suggest that these surface level indicators are informed by educational, familial and employment discourses, which in turn are bedded in foundational discourses of femininity, romance, marriage and motherhood. McLaren (1996) states that *'Discourses create linguistic and social positions which they then 'invite' their subjects to assume ... [These] discourses make certain choices appear as 'natural' rather than as socially constructed ... institutionalised practices which serve definite interests. Western patriarchal culture makes girls offers they cannot fully refuse'* (pp280-281).

In the next chapter I move on to talk about the participants and to discuss the data collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation methods used.

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## **Chapter Three**

### **Methods – Theory and Practice**

***It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have  
all the evidence. It biases the judgement.***

(Conan Doyle: A Study in Scarlet)

#### **Introduction**

Burr (1997) remarks that with its linguistic centrality, constructionist research shows a '*marked preference for qualitative methods*' (p11) because they too are language-oriented. However, together with Moscovici (1984) and Gergen (1985), she does not dismiss the possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods on the basis that all methods are social constructs.

Liebrucks (2001) utilises the positivist tradition to illustrate this point by arguing that rather than being totally objective, at the start of any research enterprise, scientists discuss and negotiate the type of equipment to use, the degree of inaccuracy to be allowed, the number of trials to be undertaken and what counts as replication. Thus, even in the positivist tradition '*factual knowledge is the product of a creative interpretation process that is carried out in social interaction*' (p369). Furthermore, much research is subject to government, equipment manufacturers'/suppliers', research institutes' and funding bodies', etc., influence, therefore it is difficult for any research to claim that its findings are totally value-free and objective.

So what methods are appropriate for a constructionist study? Gergen (1985) maintains that any methodology can be used that enables the researcher to '*develop a more compelling case*' (p273), that there are no fixed rules, in other words, an '*instrument is an instrument, not an end in itself*' (Strauss & Corbin:1998:27).

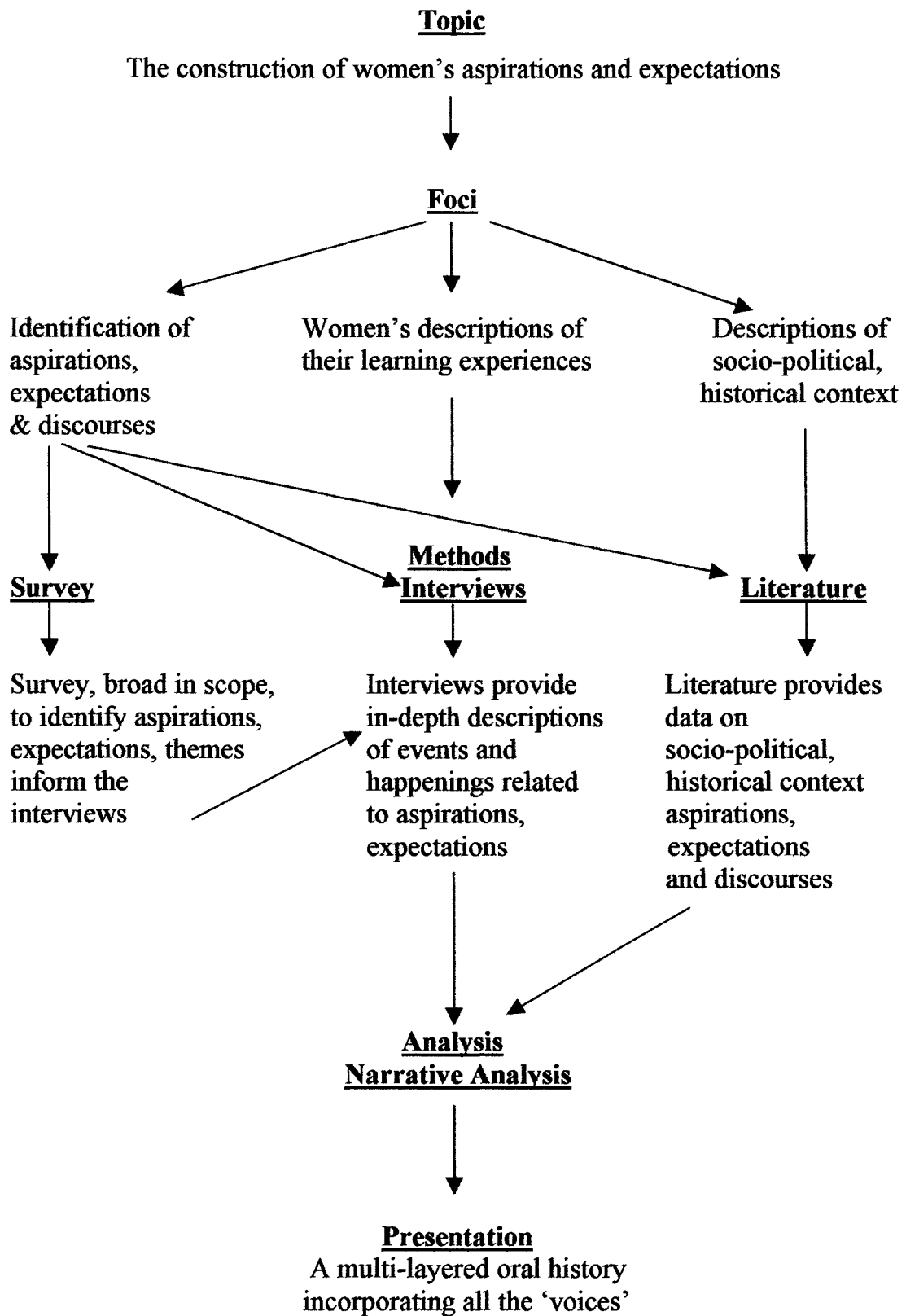
Given that the aims of this study are to explore women's learning experiences and the ways in which their life aspirations and expectations are constructed, the principle method of data collection I have employed is that of in-depth interviews. Data from the interviews are presented as an oral history in Chapters 4 – 11. As a

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starting point, and as a means of informing the interviews, I first surveyed a large number of participants to gain a broad perspective of the topic under investigation. An account of the survey is presented in Appendix 1: pp232-250.

As well as data collected from participants, because constructionist research places emphasis on socio-political, historical context, I have collected data from related literature, literature that permeates the whole project rather than residing in a separate literature review chapter. I then conducted a narrative analysis to produce a multi-layered account of the mature and teenage women's aspirational/expectational development.

The methodological strategy used in this study is presented in Fig 1 overleaf, following which I present the participants and discuss the data collection and analysis methods used.



**Fig 1: Methodological Strategy**

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## **Participants**

To facilitate an exploration of aspirational/expectational development over time, I have worked with a group of 40-50 year old mature women and a group of 15-17 year old teenage women. I anticipated that by taking 1950 as a starting point – the year in which I was born – and 2000 as an end point, to facilitate inclusion of today's girls, any similarities/differences in aspirations and expectations would become visible.

In terms of sampling, from a constructionist perspective, generalisation – the usual outcome of positivist, probability sampling – is not a research objective. I am not suggesting that my findings should necessarily be limited to these participants; indeed I hope the study will have a wider audience. Rather, I am suggesting that the findings do not need to be statistically significant to have relevance to other groups of women.

The participants are mainly working-class, white, British and located in a community education organisation and schools. The criterion of white British is premised on the fact that this study does not aim to investigate the experiences of different ethnicities. Cannon *et al* (1991) criticise such an approach, suggesting that deliberate exclusion of different ethnicities means that the '*social realities of other groups ... become relegated to side issues*' (p247). However, my reading of Sharpe (1994) amply illustrated how ethnicity constructs experience in unique ways, ways that would altogether change the focus of this study. It is not my intention to sideline particular groups and consequently I explained the inclusion criteria at length in initial discussions with gatekeepers.

The stated venues were chosen because I regarded community education provision to be one of the most likely places where I could meet a large number of women of the target age range, and schools provide the only location where I could access a large number of 15-17 year old girls.

Specifying the parameters for inclusion is a form of purposive sampling where researchers seek out '*groups, settings and individuals where ... the processes being studied are most likely to occur*' (Denzin & Lincoln:1994:104), or in my case where

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the target groups were most likely to be found. Simply stated this sounds very straightforward, whereas in practice it was anything but. I encountered problems in gaining access to the teenage women and although my sampling remained purposive, in order to continue the study I had no choice but to resort to convenience sampling. Whilst not desirable, Flick (1998) and Silverman (2000) both remark that this may be the only way to continue where problems of access become critical barriers. I had worked hard at gaining access to schools – on occasions to no avail – and was left with very little choice but convenience, as I will illustrate below in introducing the teenage women.

On the question of *where* participants were located, access to suitable venues was, in the first instance, determined by my employment commitments. With limited free time I decided that potential survey and interview participants would have to be located within a 15-mile radius of my work and home sites. This decision was crucial as it allowed me to accommodate data collection into a heavy work schedule.

This was an important consideration for me, relating as it does to time allocation and management. Being self-employed meant that meeting agents, issuing and collecting questionnaires, conducting interviews, visiting libraries, etc, had to be carried out instead of working, which meant that I wasn't earning. There were many occasions when time proved to be a major stressor because employment activities such as course preparation and marking etc had to be carried on long into the night in order to meet my employment obligations and to free up research time.

I have included the criterion of working-class because I consider this to be my class of origin, potentially providing me with an experiential reference point in relation to the participants, i.e. in terms of the '*lived relationships surrounding social arrangements of production, exchange, distribution and consumption [and] lifestyle, educational experiences and patterns of residence*' (Bradley:1996:19), and also because the options available to working-class women have always been materially different to those of middle-class women.



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Skeggs (2004) discusses difference as existing not only **between** the working- and middle-class, but also **within** the working-class itself. In this view the working class has consistently been '*differentially cleaved into the respectable and unrespectable*' (p97), a notion which can be traced back to Victorian ideas of the deserving poor, archetypically the '*honest factory hand or 'our Mam', symbol of hearth and home*' (Munt:2000:8), and the undeserving poor, archetypically the '*offensive Sun-reader, beyond the efforts of educational patronage, too stupid and self-interested to join a union*' (ibid:8). The point is that the working class has always been portrayed as Other to the middle-class standard.

This middle-class standard has come to represent the norm, consequently the working-class represents deviance, a deviance which must be corrected '*for fear of the collapse of civilized life itself*' (Walkerline:1997:30). Skeggs (2004) suggests that the '*respectable middle-class [is a] phantasmic construction of the modern nation*' (p98) that places huge pressure on the working-class to change because its obduracy is holding back middle-class progress and the development of the nation.

Just as discourse and language actively produce that of which they speak, so perhaps silence actively eradicates that of which it makes no mention. Currently there is a view that talking about class in a post-traditional society is irrelevant. But how can we all be middle-class, when investigations such as the Rowntree Report of 1995 show that inequalities in Britain are increasing, when '*Unemployment, insecurity and deprivation remain the lot for many working-class people*' (Bradley:1996:47). Walkerline *et al* (2001) question whether it is possible to view oppression and exploitation as if they were nothing more than intellectual concepts when '*social class, alongside gender and race, remains one of the most powerful factors in the shaping of our lives and dealing our life chances*' (p23).

Those who advocate the demise of class maintain that in post-traditional society class is not as '*a pre-existing slot to which we are assigned, but a set of contestable relations; it is not a given, but a process*' (Medhurst:2000:20). In this process individuals are free to choose from a myriad of lifestyle options. By distancing oneself from tradition, '*lives take on an independent quality which, for the first time, makes possible the experience of personal destiny*' (Beck:1992:94).

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The problem with this perspective is that people are *'always/already implicated in a process of positioning, cultural differentiation and resource access, that by necessity involves the making of social distinction. Thus individualization cannot be anything but a cultural process involving differentiation from others and differential access to resources'* (Skeggs:2004:52-3), so perhaps Beck's arguments only apply to a small minority of already privileged people.

I see social class as being an important factor in women's aspirational/expectational development, a factor that may have a bearing on answers to the question: Are things different for girls today'. From this general outline of who and where, I will now discuss the mature and teenage women in more detail.

### Mature Women

The mature women were all located at a community education establishment which provides personal development and vocational skills training courses. The purpose of these courses is to assist students to make informed choices about their futures;<sup>2</sup> students of diverse ages and backgrounds are recruited from the Tyne and Wear area. This is the only organisation I contacted because of its student diversity and the manager's unstinting commitment to the project. I felt confident that there would be sufficient numbers of women who met the inclusion criteria for both the survey and the interviews.

I spoke to the manager requesting permission to approach women attending courses run by the organisation. The manager agreed on the understanding that the content of the survey and interviews had nothing to do with the organisation itself, which I assured the manager they do not, and that any information regarding the organisation itself would remain confidential and anonymous, which I agreed to. The manager provided written consent but the letter is not included in the appendices due to the agreed confidentiality constraints.

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<sup>2</sup> Information provided by the Manager and the organisation's annual report

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### Teenage Women

In the first instance I wrote to all the senior schools within my 15-mile target area explaining the nature of the research and asking if they would be willing to participate in the survey (App2:p251). Initially I had very little success, receiving either refusals or non-responses. Eventually, and after some persistence, *'I had a phone call ... agreeing for me to go in and talk about my research. [The teacher] said she can see no objection to issuing the questionnaire, but naturally she wants to talk to me about it first ... I jumped for joy when I put the phone down'* (RD:1998:84-85). And then I received a second positive response from another school. As these were the only positive responses I received, these were the schools I worked with – hence having to resort to convenience sampling as the only means of conducting the study. Details of these schools are included in the survey – Appendix 1:pp232-250.

Because of timetabling and examination commitments, the schools participating in the survey could not continue the partnership into the interview phase and I had serious doubts about the feasibility of conducting the interviews, particularly as I had difficulties in eliciting responses from schools. The difficulty was eventually resolved by a colleague's personal intervention and introduction to Galitt High School where I was granted permission to interview some of their students, again an example of the necessity for resorting to convenience sampling.

Galitt High School is a large, mixed, urban comprehensive, situated in an area where unemployment is high and has been for many years. Ability levels on entry to Galitt are lower than the national average, and the level of special educational needs is higher than the national average. Even though attainment levels remain lower than national averages, pupils make considerable advances as they progress through the school in relation to their starting points. At Galitt girls perform considerably better than boys in GCSE and A/AS attainments.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Information on the schools is taken from School Literature, Ofsted Reports and Ward Profiles

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I do not consider working with different participants in the survey and the interviews to be detrimental because it is the construction of aspirational/expectational development that is being explored, not individual actors' lives.

### **Confidentiality**

All the study participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. To this end completed questionnaires have been coded and interviewees have selected their own pseudonyms. I agreed with participants that only sample pages of raw data would be included in any appendices and that only my supervisors would see the complete raw data set, an agreement that has been honoured. Both completed questionnaires and interview transcripts have been secured in a locked office through the duration of the study and shredded upon completion of the study.

Issues of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity are always important considerations. At its simplest, informed consent means that participants should understand what the study is about and what is to be done with their information. They should understand that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time. But even this simple statement is problematic, what constitutes informed consent and would participants have the confidence to refuse, withdraw, or retract?

Berg (1989) suggests that interviewees imply consent in responding to interview questions, but this takes no account of contextual power relations. Do people volunteer because they want to or because they feel pressured to do so, e.g. by peers or teachers?

As far as the survey is concerned, I feel that the issue of informed consent is closely allied to how potential participants are briefed by the agents who are distributing the questionnaire. I issued a small number of questionnaires to participants in the mature women's group, but I had no control over how the majority of the mature women and all the teenage women were briefed. Reflecting on this process I realise that I would have preferred to have more control, but the practicalities made this impossible. On the other hand, as I conducted all the interviews personally I was able to brief the participants myself and feel that all the interviewees did participate voluntarily.

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Having introduced the participants, I will now discuss the interviews and the data analysis.

### **Interviews**

Although the survey (App1:pp232-250) provided me with a general understanding of the issues and questions involved, deciding on the most appropriate interview strategy to take these issues/questions forward was not a straightforward process. I returned to basic principles and asked myself, what was I going to do with the interview data? The answer to this question helped me make decisions about the most appropriate interview strategy.

From my methodological reading I knew I wanted the analysis and presentation of the data to take a narrative (or oral history) form of the type described by Gergen (IR7) and Polkinghorne (1995), and in order to conduct such an analysis I required descriptions of events and happenings – or diachronic data, as opposed to '*categorical answers to interviewer questions*' (Polkinghorne:1995:12) – or synchronic data. Therefore I needed an open interview format where participants could provide descriptions of events and happenings related to the issues and questions that had arisen in the survey.

To facilitate this approach I felt it was important that potential interviewees should have some knowledge of the survey data, enough to inform, but not to unduly influence their responses, enough to set the scene and '*make the questions less abstract*' (Chase:1995:6). Riessman (1993) notes that some researchers have used visual aids such as storyboards as a means of setting the scene, and Cannon *et al* (1991) issued '*a one-page information form*' (p240) to their volunteers. I constructed a pre-briefing sheet (App3:pp252-255) consisting of a 'story' based on the survey data, and issues for participants to think about prior to interview. I stressed that this was only one interpretation of the survey data, and that what was more important were their views. As well as the pre-briefing sheet, I also designed a loosely based interview schedule covering Education, Aspirations and Expectations, Family Life, Women's Role, Employment and Social Change (App4:pp256-257). The schedule was to act as a prompt if the conversations strayed too far or indeed if they came to a

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halt. In total I interviewed twelve mature women and eleven teenage women and their accounts are presented as an oral history in Chapters 4-11.

It can be argued that the pre-briefing sheet is an inappropriate, structured and leading instrument when used as part of a semi-structured interview strategy. My response to such an argument is that as a lead in instrument it provided potential interviewees with information about the study based on the survey data, as opposed to me presenting them with my own views. It *'helped them decide ... whether they wanted to participate or not. It meant that they weren't taken too much unawares by what we were going to talk about. It's all very well to say at the start that they can pull out at any point if they want to. It's quite another to do so when you are face-to-face/one-to-one. You need a certain level of self-confidence to do that'* (RD:2000:172). In the event, some of the participants remarked that the pre-briefing sheet had raised their interest, set them thinking about the issues and had encouraged them to participate. As there were no negative comments and no one refused to participate, I think it did serve its intended purpose.

The interviewees were assured that their information would remain confidential and that only my supervisors and myself would see the full data set. The interviewees selected their own pseudonyms as a means of maintaining their anonymity.

Ensuring anonymity is neither as straightforward, nor as unproblematic as it sounds. In a narrative analysis almost the full dialogue of the participants are presented, which means that participants may recognise themselves, and readers who know them may recognise them too, which clearly makes them more vulnerable than they would be in conventional, decontextualised studies. However, the time-lag between data collection and completion of the study should go some way towards ensuring anonymity, as by the time of completion the participants will have dispersed and be engaged in completely different life activities. In addition I have masked all references to the names of other people and locations.

The interviews raised some emotionally difficult issues for me: *'with one or two exceptions – I haven't enjoyed doing these [teenage women] interviews very much at all. Compared with [the mature women] ... these never really seemed to get going,*

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*no matter how hard I tried. Each week I have come home and reflected on what happened, and felt dissatisfied ... I think it probably has a lot to do with the age difference between them and me. How do they see me? What do I represent to them? ... What I seemed to struggle with most was talking to them in language and concepts that meant something to them. And as discourse is so central to constructionism, this is a very pertinent point. Our discourse use is not the same'* (RD:2001:211). Perhaps, like McRobbie (1994), my anxiety concerning writing about these young women stems from the fact that I am '*at once too close and too far away. I am too old'* (p155), I am encroaching on their private space.

I have come to realise that for both parties to enter the interview context as equal partners is – generally – an unrealistic expectation, given all the possible power differentials inherent in the situation. For example, the researcher may be '*older, more educated, from a different social class and ethnic background than the women she interviews'* (Holland & Ramazanoglu:1995:283-4), and as such each party brings different perspectives, experiences and expectations to the interview situation, factors which are very difficult to lay aside, no matter how open-minded one aims to be. I was conscious of occupying a 'different' position to the teenage women in that I am older than them and I do have a different level of education and occupation, but I worked hard to put them at their ease, to avoid patronising them.

So why didn't I experience these anxieties with the mature women? How did they see me? It is possible that they too saw me as an authority figure, I was still the researcher, my education and occupational experiences are different to theirs, but it didn't feel like this, possibly because I positioned myself as a member of their cohort, as someone who has shared many of their generational-cultural experiences.

Whereas I could immediately construct a whole social experience when one mature woman spoke about the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), I had no idea what one teenage woman meant when she used the phrase 24:7, nor what it conjured up for her. And not knowing made me feel vulnerable, so much so that I didn't ask for an explanation because I was afraid I might appear stupid. Reflecting on this sentence I seem to have stumbled on an answer to my feelings of discomfort. Perhaps I experienced discomfort because in some of the interactions with the

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teenage women I felt vulnerable, when vulnerability is not supposed to be part of the researcher persona.

All these feelings, positive and negative, have consequences for the research process. Anxiety and vulnerability could have affected my ability to 'hear' what the teenage women were actually saying; feelings of affinity with the mature women could also have affected my ability to 'hear' what they were actually saying too.

Nevertheless, I think being aware of and critically reflecting on my feelings helped me to listen to the participants' voices on the interview tapes much more closely, enabling me to hear what they were saying. What was particularly helpful was leaving some time between conducting the interviews and working on the analysis. I created a space in which my emotional barriers could subside so that when I did come back to the transcripts I was able to say: *'On the one hand, I feel that I am approaching the transcripts with fresh eyes, and yet on the other, reading these pages again conjures up the faces, expressions, laughter and sadness of the people I talked to. It is a happy and a poignant experience which once again makes me realise how much these women and girls have given me'* (RD:2001:223).

The interviews lasted anything from 40 minutes to two hours, and transcribing the interview tapes was a very lengthy process, one that had to be carried out in stages to avoid errors that arise from fatigue. As I was transcribing the tapes I developed an annotation system (App5:p258) to account for the emphases, pauses, inaudible sections, deletions etc.

I have tried to maintain the speakers' vernacular usage wherever possible, only removing multiple repeats of 'erms' and the like. The intention is not to patronise anyone's language use, rather my intention is to present as accurate a portrayal of the participants as possible. Nelson (Times Higher Educational Supplement 28.3.03) states that re-presenting a person's vernacular language use is a patronising and discriminating process. I disagree with this view in that a person's vernacular language use is itself a construction, one which positions that person in a particular social group. These social groups sustain identity and have a direct bearing on aspirational/expectational development. I do not mean that one is trapped in a



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particular social group and language usage for life, only that such groups are influential in the early learning experiences of individuals.

However, no matter how hard I tried to be faithful to the spoken word as I transcribed the tapes, I have to accept that my transcripts can never be *'fully equivalent to the talk'* (Riessman:1993:40). In the first place they do not capture the non-verbal signals that carry so much meaning, and in the second, transcription is itself a form of interpretation. It is the researcher who decides what to leave in and what to take out, and even leaving out a pause can alter the meaning of what has been spoken. This is a cautionary tale, reminding me yet again of the power imbalance between researcher and researched.

In addition to transcription conventions and vernacular language use, two further issues require consideration at this point, namely the type of data collected and 'memory'. Whilst my intention was to encourage participants to describe events and happenings, in practice their talk flows back and forth between diachronic and synchronic forms. On the whole, the mature women provide more diachronic data than the teenage women. Is this because they have more life experience and verbal competence than the teenage women? It's difficult to tell. I am not suggesting that the teenage women had little to offer in the way of description, they did, but they provided more synchronic data than the mature women.

In terms of memory, Proctor & Padfield (1994/5) remark that one of the problems of retrospection is that *'people's memories are clearly selective [therefore] there is a need for caution in deploying recollections as evidence'* (p24). However, I am not attempting to deploy memories as evidence, not in the positivist sense of seeking objective truth. Rather, I am interested in the participants' experiences and the discourses that have made some experiences more accessible than others.

An interview is an interaction where interviewees construct and reconstruct the version of events they want to offer on this occasion. Whilst it may be possible to socio-historically situate some of the events described, for example, through examination of school records, examination certificates, work history documentation etc, this is not critical to this account. Indeed, as Garrett (1998) remarks, there can be

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no pure account because *'the present inevitably 'contaminates' the past, for it is only possible to speak about the past from the present'* (p37). In this view, contamination occurs as a result of new experiences, new encounters with others and the influence of all forms of media messaging.

The critical point about a narrative account is that all such accounts are constructions open to diverse interpretations. In this study the participants are constructing their accounts, I am constructing mine, various voices from the literature are heard, and readers bring their own constructions to an interpretation of the text. Thus numerous constructions come together to form this oral history; and as such it is impossible to say that one version is more or less truthful, more or less real than another.

### **Interview Analysis**

Conventionally, interview transcripts are analysed by extracting themes and categories common to all the interviews, thereby rendering the data amenable to quantification, in a manner similar to quantitative analysis. In the process, lived experience is decontextualised and participants' voices are marginalized, making it hard to envisage the real people and the aspects of their lives which they have contributed to the research.

An alternative method of analysis is a 'narrative analysis'. This is an analytic strategy in which findings are presented in the form of a narrative or story or oral history. At the start of this project I had envisaged such a style of presentation, but I didn't know how it could be achieved and it was quite some time before I chanced upon Polkinghorne (1995) and Gergen's (IR7) narrative analysis models.

Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that rather than separating and counting, events and 'voices' can be woven together to form a single *'complex and layered whole'* (p141), or story. Similarly, Gergen and Gergen (IR11) comment that the voices of participants and scholars can be woven together to produce a *'sophisticated, multi-textured and sensitive rendering'* of the data.

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In one sense the term 'story' is problematic in that it carries connotations of make-believe, or lack of truth. Polkinghorne (1995) answers these criticisms by arguing that stories, rather than scientific theories, are the forms of knowing in which people make sense of their lives, and it is in this sense that stories can be viewed as an alternate to positivistic theorising as a way of understanding human life.

By way of illumination, Polkinghorne (1991) suggests that one way of understanding the concept of 'story' in this context is to think about the way in which people's lives are situated within specific socio-political, historical contexts or cultures, where each culture has its own stock of stories. These cultural stories are the 'exemplar plots' that people use *'to configure the events in their own lives'* (p147), that is, they are the influences that impact on people's actions and decisions. One such cultural story, (or, from a constructionist perspective, discourse), in western society is that good mothers stay at home to look after their children, an exemplar plot that influences the actions and decisions taken by women.

Polkinghorne and Gergen devised models for undertaking narrative analyses. Polkinghorne (1995), for example, distinguishes between two types of narrative inquiry. The first, paradigmatic, is concerned with analysing storied data. That is, participants are encouraged to tell stories relating to the topic under investigation. The collected stories are then analysed by methods such as content analysis whereby themes and categories common to all the stories collected are identified. The second type of inquiry is a narrative inquiry. Here the analysis integrates non-storied descriptions of events and happenings and multiple voices around a central plot in order to **produce** stories as the **outcome** of the research. In a narrative inquiry data are synthesized rather than separated as in a paradigmatic inquiry.

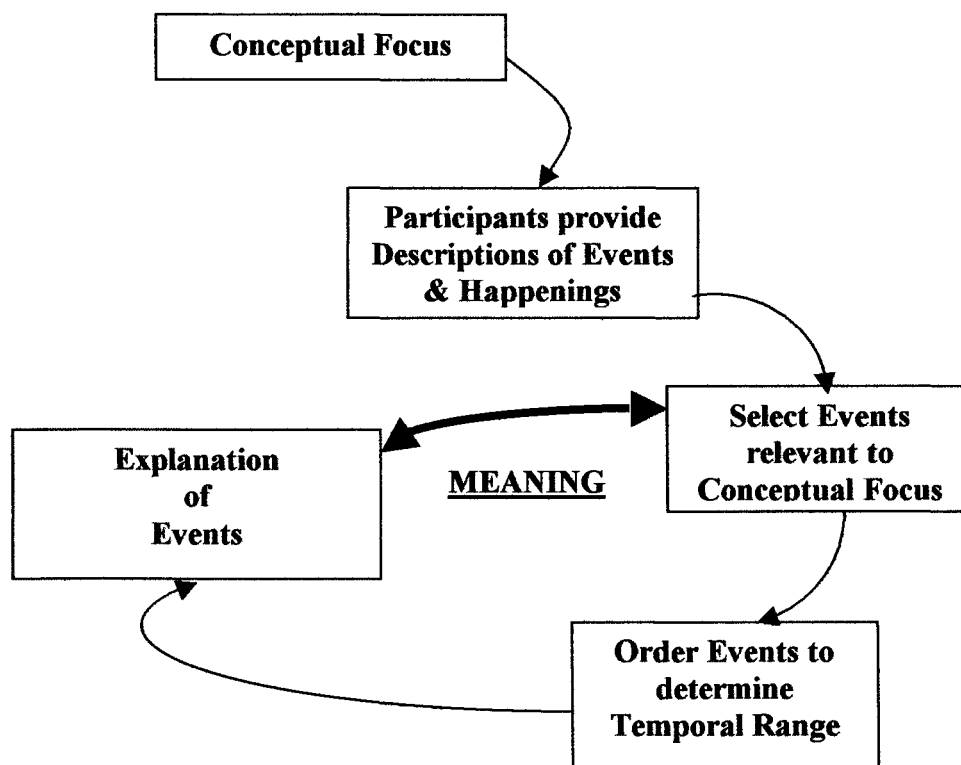
In a narrative analysis, a plot emerges from participants' descriptions of events and happenings. This plot enables the researcher to decide on the beginning and end of the story, that is, its temporal range or time frame. The temporal range then directs the researcher to those events and happenings that are most appropriate to the story, together with the order in which they should appear. Meaning thus develops through the interaction of the plot and the selected events/happenings.

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The '*result of a narrative analysis is an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about*' (Polkinghorne:1995:16). And the emphasis here is on *might* because any story represents but one among a number of possible constructions, that is, there may be alternative interpretations, different ways of telling the story. Whilst a narrative account is necessarily a retrospective account, and whilst the future cannot be predicted, Josselson (1995) remarks that this retrospective account contains '*the elements out of which the future will be created*' (p35). Thus, perhaps the aspirations and expectations of future generations of women are contained in the retrospective accounts of the mature and teenage women in this story.

Gergen's (IR7) approach to narrative analysis is slightly different to Polkinghorne's. In Gergen's model the researcher or narrator starts by explaining the endpoint or outcome of the story and the value of the point being made. This endpoint determines the kind of events that can be included in the account, the narrator can't include all that takes place but must select only those events that are relevant to the story's conclusion. The relevant events are then placed in some kind of order, usually a linear, temporal sequence. Finally, the narrator provides an explanation of the events. This is achieved by selecting those events that are generally accepted to be causally linked, that is, each event should be a product of that which preceded it. Meaning is thus generated through the interaction of the events and happenings and their causal linkages.

The starting point for both models is concerned with the conceptual focus of the research; Polkinghorne refers to the 'theme being investigated', and Gergen to a 'valued endpoint'. Participants provide descriptions of events and happenings and the researcher selects those that are relevant to the conceptual focus. In both models the descriptions that are chosen determine the narrative's temporal range and the order in which events appear. As the events are presented an attempt is made to explicate their meaning. For my purposes I have amalgamated these two models into a single framework as shown in Fig 2 below:



**Fig 2: Model of Narrative Analysis**

The conceptual focus of my narrative is the construction of women's aspirations and expectations. Its value lies in uncovering the ways in which women are positioned in discourses, and in uncovering the ways in which women accommodate and resist these discourses in their daily lives. By telling the story of these women's aspirational/expectational development, I hope that other women will be enabled to critically examine their own positioning and, through understanding, that they may be empowered to bring about change in their own lives if **they** choose to do so.

The mature and teenage women I worked with have provided descriptions of events and happenings from their early lives in their childhood families to the point where they are about to leave school, thus the temporal range dates from 1950 to 2000. I have used a linear, temporal sequence in that the oral history starts with early childhood experiences, moves on to middle childhood and then to adolescence, and because of the events the mature women wanted to talk about, they continue with early adulthood events that took place after they left school.

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Having outlined the narrative analysis model, I will now discuss some of the technicalities of dealing with the interview data.

Analysis of the interview data consists of three distinct phases:

- 1) working on the transcripts looking for descriptions of events and happenings
- 2) developing a database of events and happenings and identifying associated discourses
- 3) building the narrative account, identifying possible discursive influences on aspirational/expectational development

In the first phase I began by reading the transcripts a number of times to refamiliarise myself with the participants and our discussions. I marked the various events and happenings by placing a descriptor in the margin of the transcript. Included in the appendices are sample pages of one mature woman's transcript (App6:pp259-261) and one teenage woman's transcript (App7:pp262-264). I have only included sample pages because of the confidentiality agreement between the participants and myself. This was agreed in an attempt to minimise the identification of individuals.

As I worked through the transcripts I maintained a developing descriptor list (App8:pp265-266). This descriptor list proved to be extremely useful as it helped me to see reasonably easily the topics the participants had spoken about. Working through the transcripts I decided to accept both the synchronic and diachronic data because the participants had provided their accounts in the best way that *they* could, which has to be the most important point.

The second stage of the analysis proved to be a far greater task than I had anticipated. Using the descriptor codes, I developed a Microsoft Access database of paraphrased quotes and phrases. The database includes the following information:

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CATEGORY	PURPOSE
REF NO	Identifies the participant: e.g. G2-10=Teenage Woman-interview 10
LINE NO	Identifies the relevant line in the transcript to facilitate data retrieval
CODE	Identifies the event/happening descriptor code used in the transcript
EVENT	Provides paraphrased data from the transcript
DISCOURSE	Suggests possible discourse related to event described

**Fig 3: Design of Interview Analysis Database**

This wasn't a complex task, I say it was greater than I had anticipated because of the sheer volume of material I had to work through and the length of time this activity took. But once again, it was a useful exercise because it enabled me to search the database in a number of ways, for example, by descriptor code or participant number and these searches were completed in seconds, whereas it would have taken days to physically search through the hard copies. Sample pages of the databases are included in Appendices 9 and 10 (pp267-268 & pp269-270). This time they are samples because of the sheer volume of pages in the full databases.

In the third stage of analysis I began to piece together the mature and teenage women's oral histories, interweaving all the different voices, i.e. the participants, the literature and myself as narrator/participant, and from this I was able to identify some of the influences that have impacted on these mature and teenage women's aspirational/expectational development.

Once the oral histories were constructed, I realised that a further – fourth – stage of analysis was required for the final chapter, one in which I had to look for instances of experiential similarity and difference, where I had to look for factors that would assist me in addressing the question: 'Are things different for girls today?' Appendix 11 (pp271-273) contains sample pages of this fourth stage analysis.

### **Evaluating Narrative**

Riessman (1993) asks, '*How are we to evaluate a narrative analysis? Can one tell a better one from a worse one?*' (p64). The question is particularly pertinent when narrative accounts are criticised for their subjectivity, for their lack of measurability,

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replication and generalizability. Polkinghorne (1995) responds to such criticisms by saying that because this is the *'researcher's construction, it is inappropriate to ask if it is the "real" or "true" story'* (p20). Bruner (1986) suggests that researchers could benefit by identifying *'believable (though not necessarily "true") historical accounts'* (p13), and Denzin (1989) suggests sincerity as a strategy for evaluating narratives, where sincerity contains elements of subjective and historical truth and historical truth relates to the verification of reported incidents by triangulation.

Narrative accounts must be evaluated if they are to be taken seriously, even though this is a difficult task. It is difficult because narratives do not rely on realist assumptions, because narratives are not exact accounts of what happened. Rather, they present one person's point of view, where different individuals may construct different accounts of the same event, *'depending on the values and interests of the narrator'* (Riessman:1993:64).

From this perspective narrative accounts have their own agendas, shaped by the narrator who decides what is and is not included, but this does not mean that the account is unreliable. Reliability rests in the fact that narrative accounts are centred in cultural stories that enable people within a particular social group to understand each other and their own actions, a centrality which enables a reader to make judgements concerning an account's reliability. For example, if I were to say that in the 1960s my mother described herself as working 24.7, this would make the account unreliable, as this particular phrase – 24.7 – was not used at that time, however, it would not make the account untrue. Because cultural stories are subject to change it is impossible to say that one account is true and another is untrue, only that what is appropriate in a particular setting today may not be appropriate in a similar setting tomorrow. This means that truth is relative, and that *'traditional notions of reliability simply do not apply to narrative studies'* (Riessman:1993:65).

So, in what ways might one evaluate a narrative account? Polkinghorne (1995), drawing upon Dollard (1935), suggests that the cultural context of the story should be considered because people absorb the values, social rules and meaning systems of their culture. Similarly, people's choice of actions is important because the story is about the main characters and the choices, actions, interests and motivations which



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contribute towards an outcome. People are not merely acted upon by external forces; they take action that alters the setting. The finished story needs to be plausible, that is, the data should result in a believable story about the participants' responses and actions and the theme being investigated. Finally, one should consider whether any alternative interpretation is possible/plausible because the narrator's own positioning may colour the conclusions drawn.

In the account presented here I have triangulated the mature and teenage women's stories with aspects of their sociohistorical, cultural context. It is through this context and the participants' actions that I have attempted to illustrate the possible influence that discourses have in the construction of women's aspirations and expectations. Throughout I have tried to be transparent about my own personal situatedness in this project, I acknowledge that this account is my construction and I accept that others may place different constructions on these events. Even so, I feel that the story is plausible because of how it spotlights the influences on these mature and teenage women's aspirational/expectational development. But then I would say that, wouldn't I, given the personal investment I have in the project, therefore the criterion of plausibility is probably better assessed by people other than myself.

### **Researcher Roles**

Talking about my personal situatedness in this project brings me to an important point concerning the researcher's change of role from being a researcher to being a narrator, a metamorphosis I experienced when writing the oral history in Chapters 4 – 11. This change of role is an important transition because taking on the role of narrator has ethical consequences concerning who has control of the research process and how far the participants are involved in that process. Asking permission to use material does involve participants to a certain extent, but should they be fully involved in the interpretation process too? That is, should participants have a say regarding the interpretation of the data and what is included in the final product?

It is possible to argue that to reduce the power differential between researcher and researched, participants should be involved in the selection and interpretation process. After all, the words belong to them, therefore they should have a say in how their words are used. Chase (1996), on the other hand, makes the point that sharing

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work in progress with participants *'does not necessarily lead to agreement on how interpretations should be made, what is sociologically significant, and what should be published'* (pp50-51). Indeed, sharing work in progress with participants could cause many insoluble problems, the worst of which would be failure to complete the work if participants refused permission to use their data. And however one looks at this issue, in the first instance it is the researcher who determines the aims of the research, the types of data to be collected and the type of analyses and interpretation to be employed, therefore the researcher **does** exercise a control that is not shared by the participants.

I asked the participants if they would like a copy of their transcript to read and comment on. About half said yes and these were sent out as soon as tapes were transcribed. None of these participants made changes to their transcripts. I did not, however, ask them to read my work-in-progress for a number of reasons that have to do with the interpretive process itself, as well as questions of who has control over that process.

In my analysis I am not seeking to ascertain if I have understood participants correctly, I am not analysing what they 'intended' to say. Rather, my analytic focus is concerned with women's learning experiences, with the discourses that shape women's aspirations and expectations. It is concerned with the ways in which they have accommodated or resisted these discourses, and with discourse stability/change across a particular time-frame. Because of this analytic focus I felt it was inappropriate to ask participants to comment on my interpretations. Instead I asked colleagues who are familiar with social constructionism and narrative analysis to read my interpretations.

Taking this decision means that I have retained authority over the research process. Of course, it can be argued that this stance reflects conventional social science research that privileges the researcher's interpretation, cursorily acknowledges ethical considerations and then renders the participants invisible. I don't think I have done this; I have certainly tried not to do this, the voices of the participants are clearly audible in the pages of the oral history. Whilst I am conscious that this account is presented in my interpretive voice, I don't think my voice conflicts with

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those of the participants, I believe that *'meaning is collaboratively accomplished'* (Riessman:1993:42) by incorporating all the voices, that is the participants', the literature, my voice and the understanding of the reader.

So, what do the participants gain from their participation, for giving their time and emotional energy? There has to be a payback for them, otherwise they might, justifiably, feel exploited, particularly as they will be anonymous. hooks (1989) says that writing her biography enabled her to view her *'past from a different perspective and to use this knowledge as a means of self growth and change in a practical way'* (p159). I am attempting to look at the participants' learning experiences from a different perspective, that is, from the perspective of taken-for-granted knowledge and the discourses that shape that taken-for-granted knowledge. During our discussions, some of the participants commented that they hadn't thought of things in particular ways before, or that, in the telling, they themselves were beginning to see things from a different perspective. In addition, by turning attention to discursive practices influential in aspirational/expectational development, I am inviting speakers and readers *'to listen for the discursive disjunctions that constrain their stories ... and thus constrains their understandings of their experiences'* (Chase:1996:55), to understand and change aspects of their lives, if **they** choose to do so, which I would like to think of as a liberatory objective.

### **Summary**

Whilst social constructionism – the theoretical perspective of this study – (Chapter One) has a leaning towards qualitative research methods because of their linguistic centrality, it does not eschew quantitative methods on the basis that all methods are social constructs. For constructionists there are no fixed rules; an instrument is an instrument, not an end in itself. In my exploration of the study's conceptual focus – Aspirational/Expectational Development – (Chapter Two) – I have employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods.

The first phase of data collection involved a large-scale survey, the purpose of which was to ground my initial thoughts and ideas. The survey raised issues and questions which inform the second phase of data collection – semi-structured interviews. In addition to the survey and interviews, because constructionism places emphasis on

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the socio-political, historical context, data from the literature permeate the whole account.

Using these data, I conducted a narrative analysis to produce a multi-textured oral history of the mature and teenage women's aspirational/expectational development.

In the following chapters the mature women (Chapters 4 - 8) and the teenage women (Chapters 9 - 11) talk about the learning experiences that have contributed to their aspirational/expectational development.

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***And so to the characters in these stories, bedevilled  
(like the authors?) by symptoms.***

(Fell: Serious Hysterics)

These mature and teenage women are characters in their own stories, they are characters in my story, and from their own perspective they are very real people.

Whatever else they may be,

**Liz  
Jane  
Janet  
Kate  
Tracy  
Sarah  
Susan  
Emma  
Joanne  
Bridget  
Caroline  
Elizabeth**

are the mature women

and

**Jo  
Mary  
Claire  
Marie  
Sarah  
Louise  
Danielle  
Melanie  
Christina  
Margaret  
Samantha**

are the teenage women

who shared their 'symptoms' with me.

The supporting cast in this narrative are voices  
from the literature and my voice.

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## **Chapter Four**

### **Born Circa 1950**

***Where to start is the problem, because nothing begins when it begins and nothing's over when it's over ... History is a construct... Any point of entry is possible and all choices are arbitrary.***

(Atwood: The Robber Bride)

An arbitrary choice then: Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy – the mature women who shared their learning experiences with me – were born in the 1950s in white, mainly working-class families in the North of England, as was I – so perhaps not so arbitrary a choice after all. I do not mean to suggest that there is an homogeneity among such families, only that such families share a similar cultural heritage.

In this opening chapter the mature women and I talk about our early childhood lives. We talk about families, the division of domestic labour, female characteristics and childhood socialisation, motherhood and marriage, and the employment of married women, all of which constitute facets of family influence on a girl's aspirational/expectational development. I will attempt to place the mature women's experiences within aspects of the theoretical, political and sociohistorical context of a traditional social order, as discussed in Chapter Two. The numbers in brackets following the participants' contributions refer to line numbers in their interview transcripts.

My personal memories concerning life in Britain at the start of the 1950s are very vague. I have some recollection of my mother and father both working, of gas mantles, coal fires and feeling hungry. Populist accounts such as Reader's Digest (1998) portray a Britain in the grip of continuing post-war austerity. For example, petrol rationing ended in May 1950, which didn't make much difference to my family because we didn't have a car. In 1951 a pound of steak would have cost three

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ration books and sweets weren't freely available until 1953. All rationing finally ended in July 1954.

Austerity gradually gave way to prosperity and a new national optimism found practical expression in developments such as an extensive house-building programme. The domestic image conjured up by Orwell (1937): *'Downstairs there was the usual kitchen living-room with its huge open range burning night and day* (p6) is particularly evocative of my first home. Our black-leaded kitchen range had an oven on one side and a water tank on the other; the fire burned constantly. Sunday night was bath night. Dad dragged the tin bath in from the yard and placed it in front of the fire where we all took our turn in it, there was no such thing as privacy, at least not for us children. We had an outside toilet decorated with neatly strung squares of newsprint and cold running water, not to mention the black beetles! This house was demolished in the slum clearance of the middle of the decade and we moved to a new council house which seemed like heaven.

Madgwick *et al* (1982) estimate that by 1954, nationally 300,000 new dwellings were replacing slums and bombed-out streets. In Newcastle upon Tyne, an area with a history of poor housing, by the end of the war the situation was extremely serious with many people living in overcrowded and dilapidated dwellings. Between 1947 and 1952 *'1,000 'temporary' houses and 4,300 permanent houses were built by the municipality, and another 500 for private owners'* (Miller *et al*:1960:8).

It was at this time that consumer goods such as washing machines, vacuum cleaners and television made their appearance. In 1953 – coronation year – The Times (3.6.53) reported that *'For the first time television brought many millions into the heart of that mystery, with consequences no one can measure'*. This didn't mean that millions of people owned TV sets. In 1952 *'there were still fewer than two million sets in British homes'* (Reader's Digest:1998:211). Televisions were expensive and for the coronation people crowded into the front rooms of perhaps the one family in the street who owned a black and white set. Only in the 1960s did television become more affordable.

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Kate thought about this and recalled *"I was 12 before we got a television"* (834). Emma agreed, *"I think I was about 10 or 12, yes, it was about that for me as well"* (650). I remember one November teatime in 1963, watching news of President Kennedy's assassination on our brand new television set, which would have made me 13 years old.

Another expensive item that took longer to permeate the majority of households was the telephone. Jane's parents *"weren't on the phone anyway ... there weren't many people that were. My aunt was cause they had a newsagents shop ... but they were the only people ... I think the only time my mother used the phone when I was a kid was to ring the doctor's. And she went down with her fourpence ... you know what I mean? ... That was the only time that your parents sort of used the telephone, and my mother was terrified of the phone"* (366-385).

As well as the telephone, Jane also spoke about cars, quite passionately at times when the subject turned to gendered car ownership, *"very few people had a car ... my parents didn't ...for me as a child, thinking that one day, I would be winging round in the family car picking somebody else up ... was unthinkable, because ... well, women didn't drive. I mean, even if they had a family car, the women didn't drive ... I can remember my cousin learning to drive ... and my mum thought it was dreadful ... appalling"*.

Why was that? I asked.

*"What's she going to do with a car?" And I said, 'Well, you know, they've got the car, why shouldn't she drive it?' 'But why should she? ... Why should she need the car? ... that's for him to use to go to work, and for him to use', you know, to take her shopping and things like that, you know. The fact that she could take him to work and she could go and do the shopping on her own just never occurred to my mother"* (390-417).

Not having a car affected how ordinary tasks were accomplished. For example, Joanne used to walk to the shops and carry the shopping bags, helping her mum with *"the big shop"* (266-267). At this time shops were located relatively close at hand, on the local high street, not out of town, as they tend to be now. Tracy said that



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because she didn't have a car *"We never used to go anywhere. We didn't even used to come into town"* (399-401).

As well as the practical aspects, car ownership also impacted on leisure time where it intersected with increasing paid employment leave. This meant that for people who did own cars and who were entitled to paid holidays, family holidays began to be possible. Elizabeth remembers her family holidays fondly, *"We used ... to pack the mini and, like 6 o'clock in the morning, me dad there, sandwiches made, flask a'tea. Everybody piled in this little mini with a big suitcase on top and all the way down to Cornwall. Me dad, as soon as his foot went down on that pedal, we were away (laughs) ... We had a few nice holidays and I feel quite fortunate, really, that er, ... you know, we had nice holidays"* (239-247).

Although the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act introduced the concept of paid leave, during the early 1950s not everyone was eligible, most manual workers **not** covered by national agreements weren't. For the majority of working-class people, the alternative to one or two weeks holiday was day trips. Tracy's family didn't have much money *"So, like, we never went on, I think only went on holiday once ... we used to ... live next door to this old woman ... she was really canny and she had ... a big family and she used to take us to the coast, ... maybes once or twice in the summer ... and we used to think it was brilliant. Cause that's as far as we got. If she took wer twice ... we'd had a good summer, you know. I think when I was 16 we went on holiday ... for a week. I thought 'Wow', you know"* (389-299). In the North East, Tynemouth and Whitley Bay were favoured beach resorts for a day trip, and in the month of June, there was the Hoppings fair on the Town Moor where in 1955, among other delights *'you could pay sixpence and find out 'why men leave home' or, if that was too exciting, you could go next door to see the world's smallest women, Anita the living doll'* (Newcastle Chronicle & Journal Ltd:1998).

Thus, as the mature women and I were growing up, austerity receded, employment was plentiful, rates of pay rose, people started to have leisure time and surplus money to spend. Adults were spending theirs on their homes; young people were spending theirs on clothes, records and leisure activities. It is at this point that the concept of a 'youth culture' began to emerge.

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In the 1950s I were still too young to appreciate this social development. I certainly don't remember coffee bars and jukeboxes, even though they were the 'in' place to go and listen to the latest chart-toppers such as Elvis Presley's 'Heartbreak Hotel'. Which is not to suggest that I don't remember him, I do, though whether this memory is simply retrospective is hard to say. Close your eyes; there he is, '*sporting a curled lip, a scary line in body language and a voice that was a kick in the teeth of all that was respectable*' (Reader's Digest:1998:243). Whether one liked rock 'n' roll or not – and I use this term generically rather than as referring to a particular genre – was almost immaterial, it was not about to disappear under the weight of parental disapprobation. It was more than just music; it was a forum for articulating social and political disaffection, as were iconoclastic figures such as James Dean who personified an antiestablishment attitude more reminiscent of the 1960s than the 1950s.

Susan reinforces this perception, she believes that youth culture and rebellion were innovations of her own youth, rather than that of her parents, "*You know, like, erm, my generation rebelled because before then there'd been nothing really to rebel, you know, there weren't teenagers as such. So we were all rebellious teenagers. But when you look back it was pretty mild ... But then it was outrageous*" (1731-1744). Although we laughed, it is true that the British collective memory does not generally associate the 1950s with social unrest, despite anti-communism, anti-nuclear protests and student riots. Rather, public perception of the 1950s centres on stable, happy families and respect for authority, as personified by cosy Persil and Bisto advertisements.

Thus, as the 1950s moved to a close, life in Britain seemed to be improving, even in the North of England the '*full employment of the war years continued ... Figures for unemployment were the lowest ever recorded*' (Miller *et al*:1960:9). However, underlying this public perception of prosperity are multiple sub-plots concerning the lives of ordinary people, sub-plots that shaped the mature women's and my aspirations and expectations.

In any generation parents are extremely influential to a child's aspirational/expectational development, a point not lost on Caroline, "*you follow on*

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*what your parents do. I think they very much, in most cases, influence what you do and how you go about things. Erm, cause they, from the early stages, they're developing your personality and your attitudes, erm, although that we are individuals"* (734-743).

I take aspirational/expectational development to be a social construct located in many contexts, the first being the family where, to some extent, *'What one wants depends in part on what looks possible'* (Fransella & Frost:1977:14). In this view, parents serve as role models of what seems possible.

Is the child then merely a passive recipient of the socialization process? In what Caroline says above, she seems to be suggesting not, that people may replicate parental models, but they don't necessarily have to. Having raised the general point about the importance of parental influence, we then talked more specifically about the mature women's parents, particularly their mothers, and the roles and characteristics women are supposed to have.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, traditional feminine discourse maintains that the well-adjusted female should be passive, docile, dependent, submissive, lack initiative and be unable to make rational decisions or act or think for herself (Baker Miller:1976), she is more like a child than an adult and needs the protection of a man. In the natural order of things, the girl progresses from the protection of a father to the protection of a husband, therefore a girl's main aim in life must be to find a husband. This is the good girl construction of femininity, the persistence of which has made it a blueprint for how women should behave.

But things are not always as they seem. Knowing what is expected is one thing, but how one interprets and utilises the discourse is quite another. It is possible for girls to use the femininity discourse as a form of resistance to manipulate others to achieve their own ends. How many little girls haven't, at some time, smiled sweetly to get their own way? Susan smiled as I said this, *"I used to go to me granma's quite a lot as well. Erm, like, stay with her weekends, and I got to stay up then, you know, being a nice little girl, pretty girl"* (383-385). She laughed as she spoke, knowing

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full well that she was utilising socially acceptable behaviour to achieve her own ends.

Jane, on the other hand, didn't want to be passive, docile or pretty, "*my mother says if she was looking for me all she had to do was look up a bloody tree. I mean, my mum always says my brother should have been the girl and I should have been the boy, cause apparently I was an absolute sod (laughs). I was. When I think back I was. I would have killed me. I mean, if anybody came home filthy, or something was torn, or something lost, or something like that, you know what I mean, it was me*" (432-457). Jane implies that this behaviour is non-feminine, but it is usually tolerated in a young girl.

Being up a tree, Jane is indulging in action and initiative, more typically defined as masculine behaviour and therefore out of character for a girl. But it's OK, because in childhood these characteristics – together with assertiveness and decisiveness – are indulged because everyone knows '*tomboyishness [is a] transitional stage in development: 'She'll grow out of it'*' (Oakley:1981b:105). Providing a girl conforms to the norms of femininity by the time she reaches adolescence, provided she does not '*completely reject her reproductive and domestic role, she is allowed some eccentricity*' (Sharpe:1994:83). However, should this tomboy behaviour persist into adulthood, then she is clearly '*unusual, if not definitely abnormal*' (Baker Miller:1976:7). A woman's abnormal behaviour is socially censured because it could adversely affect family life, and by extension change the social order, i.e. if women engage in masculine behaviour, this could lead to the erosion of male authority in the family and bring about changes in the division of domestic labour.

As you read this, you might say that these two vignettes are extreme examples, and perhaps they are; yet Susan and Jane don't think so. The concepts of the 'good girl' and the 'tomboy' are social constructs that provide guidelines on what is acceptable female behaviour at particular ages and in particular contexts. For all these concepts may seem immutable, contexts change, and the stereotypes with them. One of the best illustrations of contextual change is the Second World War, a time when established social norms relating to women's employment had to be re-evaluated, in the national interest.

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I am not suggesting that this contextual change led to an unproblematic change in the life trajectory of women once the war was concluded. After the war many commentators expressed the view that women should return to their former domestic role and the question merely changed from ‘what *can* a woman do?’ to ‘what *should* a woman do?’ (Myrdal & Klein:1956). Two powerful, diametrically opposed lobbies aimed to answer the question: on the one hand, women should revert to being full-time mothers and on the other hand, women should continue the trend of engaging in paid employment.

Taking the first case – women should be full-time mothers. At the end of the war there was a major concern about the falling birth rate. Although UK population has grown throughout the twentieth century, it has done so at a declining rate. In the immediate post-war period, a strong pronatalist lobby endeavoured to persuade women to return home, settle back into the role of wife and mother and produce large families. Tracy comes from a large family, and where she grew up “*there was a lot of families like us, that had big families*” (255-256). There were eight children in the family who lived next door to me, and on my estate that wasn’t unusual either.

Psychological pressure was brought to bear through the popularisation of Bowlby’s (1953) maternal deprivation theory. Bowlby argued that motherhood should be a full-time job because children could suffer psychological damage if they were ‘abandoned’ by mothers who left them to go out to work. Eventually it became clear that Bowlby’s theory was based on cases of child-trauma resulting from mother-child separation during the war (Lewis:1992). These were hardly normal circumstances and therefore extrapolation to mothers who left a child for a few hours a day to go to work, returning home each evening (Myrdal & Klein:1956) was at best unreliable, at worst positively harmful – to women.

Psychological pressure regarding motherhood remains powerful. Bridget, who doesn’t have children of her own, said that if she had had children she “*mighta stopped work, you know for the first few year. Cause it’s important to a baby to bond with the mother*” (292-298). Joanne agrees, “*if you have kids then you’re choosing to have them, then you should bring them up*” (34-35).

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Feminine and motherhood discourses would have it that **all** women aspire to be mothers; this being their natural destiny. That having children isn't necessarily a natural imperative is illustrated by the fact that Elizabeth and Caroline disagree with Joanne's concept of 'choice' and speak about the pressure placed on them. Elizabeth mused pensively, *"I quite fancy having another child because he's making me think that, but I'm wondering if he's just doing that for some sort of control over me"* (986-988). Caroline nodded and was more resigned, *"I didn't particularly want a family but my husband [did] and he said that he would only marry me providing that I would have a family"* (508-510).

In these accounts the mature women illustrate facets of the motherhood discourse that most women consciously or unconsciously navigate, the supposed biological/psychological imperatives of childbirth and the mother-child bond, the concept of personal choice and the exercise of male power as a means of controlling women. The pronatalist lobby would position women in the home as dependent wives and mothers. However, the rationale for this positioning was also underpinned by other powerful discourses. Not only was childbearing a women's natural role, but producing large families was also the way in which women could contribute to national post-war recovery by producing the workforce of the future (Greer:1984). Thus motherhood intersects with political, employment and economic discourses to reinforce the traditional family model and produce future workers.

The problem for the pronatalist lobby was that women's role had changed significantly during the war, and once change has taken place it is impossible to revert to a previous condition. Women had been employees; many of them had enjoyed their independence, they had enjoyed earning money, the companionship of likeminded others and the realisation of abilities. In addition, at this time there was a perceived change in marriage itself, a move away from the traditional model towards a more companionate model in which men's behaviour was becoming more sociable, domesticated (Brooke:2001) and even feminized (Zweig:1961).

Amongst the mature women in this study, the 'new man' is hard to spot. Only Elizabeth spoke of her father in these terms, *"Well, me dad ... always came home first ... from work and er, ... he would make the tea, and he just said, 'well, whoever*

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*came in first would make the tea'. And it was usually him, so he would make the tea for when me mam came in. So they had like a partnership, you know"* (218-222).

That Elizabeth's father was atypical is attested to by Joanne's sharp – almost resentful – retort, *"He brought in the money, didn't he! ... That's just the way it was, yes. And that was the way it was with the majority of er, friends. You know, the mums stayed at home and did the housework (...) and the dads worked. It was the rare exception for er, somebody's mum to work"* (232-246). Tracy agreed with her, with the same sharpness of tone, *"Erm, me dad used to do nowt cause he went to work ... me mam used to do everything"* (445-466). The fact that my mother worked outside the home made her very much an exception on our estate.

Kate believes that whether mothers and other women in one's family circle stay home or are employed influences what girls are likely to think and do. As she puts it, women were *"staying at home and bringing up kids [and] I think we were brainwashed ... that's what you saw around you basically"* (202-203 & 260-262), and Caroline remembers her mother-in-law saying *"girls weren't supposed to work"* (734-743). That home-based mothers were the norm is probably why Janet thought her mother *"was quite happy to be in that kind of role. And she never really expected my dad to do anything in the house ... that was mum's job"* (220-223). Jane nodded, when her dad's *"foot hit the step (...) his tea hit the table (...) it was that generation"* (330-344).

In these traditional families the father's power is acknowledged in them not doing housework, and in their meal being ready when they arrived home from work. But as well as the resentment against male power in Joanne's and Tracy's comments about fathers bringing home the money, there is also evidence that some women used ridicule and poignancy as a form of female solidarity, as a means of resisting male power.

We laughed in a rather conspiratorial manner as Kate recalled, *"I didn't know any other men who did things at home. If they did, they were looked upon as being, erm, sissy because in this part of the world, men are men,"* she laughed, *"if you understand what I mean ... When I was a kid you never saw a man pushing a pram,*

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*unless it had coal in it (laughter) (...) We'd be horrified (laughs) if we saw, like I say, unless it had coal in it. That was the only time a man pushed a pram. Or if he was a rag-man" (306-310 & 978-988). Joanne said it was rare to see a father out in public with his children. The only time her dad took her out "was to maybe go and visit his mother, you know, so we'd walk down there, it was a walk he could do" (638-640).*

But the power imbalance is not a matter for laughter; women are subordinate in these families. If, as Kate says, girls learn from the women around them, does this mean that these women served a domestic apprenticeship such as I did? To what extent were they socialised into the traditional female role?

Jane and Tracy were not expected to do housework. In this Jane considers herself lucky *"because, I mean, I wasn't allowed to do any housework because my mum had been brought up looking after six brothers and sisters and she'd had to do it. She felt that we shouldn't. Her childhood had been wasted on doing housework and looking after kids and she was determined that that wasn't going to happen to us"* (339-344). Tracy didn't have to do housework because her mother said she was clever and had to concentrate on her studies. However, Tracy admits that she manipulated this situation to her advantage, *"In hindsight I used to do nothing. Cause me mam used to say 'Tracy's reading her books, she can't do anything'. I wouldn't even go to the shop, me. I was wicked"* (451-454). Tracy's comment suggests that she now feels the weight of traditional role expectations, that she **ought** to have done her share and now feels guilty that she didn't. Whatever the reason, in not being required to do housework, Jane and Tracy are exceptions.

At the other extreme, Kate's experience is motherhood in all but biological fact, *"I mean, I looked after me sisters, I did housework, I did shopping, washing, ironing, cooking"* (248-250). Sarah's experience is much the same. Because her mother worked in the evenings, *"a lot of the (...) looking after the others fell on my shoulders. Feeding them, changing them, and terries, you know, none of this disposable stuff, bathing them, putting them to bed. I hated it"* (271-274). Sarah resented being compelled to look after her siblings and concluded, *"I'm quite sure that this is why I never wanted to get married and have kids of my own. I'd had more than enough, thank you very much"* (272-282). Like Kate and Sarah, I had to do a lot



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of cleaning and child-minding too, and I didn't like it much either, so I can empathize with their feelings.

On the whole, the mature women did not experience their involvement in domestic and childcare tasks as fulfilling, quite the contrary, their experience is a cause of resentment. Emma did enjoy aspects of childcare, but she resents the fact that her brother didn't have to do anything, *"it was girls; we had to clean up, tidy up. My brother never, ever, did the dishes and I was always ... moaning about that. Erm, we had to do ironing and shopping. But my brother never got to do anything"* (97-102). It's interesting that brothers are singled out for censure. I resented the fact that my brother was exempt too, whereas fathers, who didn't contribute either, are not.

Even though the majority of the mature women did serve a traditional domestic apprenticeship, there are alternative constructions. Tracy didn't have to do housework because she was clever, because she was studying, therefore she learned that education is of more value than housework and that she could use education to resist the domesticity, whether through a personal commitment to education or not. And although Caroline had to do domestic tasks, her experience is different again, *"we used to help out in that way and get paid for it."* She laughed, *"We were 'paid' helpers"* (167-169), so Caroline learned that work, even housework, has monetary value and can be manipulated to one's own ends.

Regardless of these alternative constructions there is one constant, it is generally girls who perform these tasks and in this sense both girls and boys learn that housework is women's work. As Oakley (1974a) remarks, domestic competency is learnt in childhood *'when girls learn to equate their femaleness with domesticity and [their] female identities are moulded round the housewife image. The performance of the housewife role in adulthood is prefaced by a long period of apprenticeship'* (p113). Thus, through observation and practice, girls internalize domesticity so that it becomes part of their personality, and to act contrary to personality induces guilt, as Tracy demonstrates when she says that it was 'wicked' of her not to help her mother.

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Interestingly, Hayes & Hopson (1971) make the point that because women are increasingly engaging in paid employment, their long domestic apprenticeship may well be preparing them for '*roles which are at least a generation out of date*' (p20), which brings me to the second case of what a woman should do, namely engage in paid employment.

During the Second World War, Britain had incurred millions of pounds of national debt, export markets had been lost, industries turned over to war production and overseas investments sold to pay for imports (Addison:1985). The export market was considered to be the key to economic recovery, therefore exports had to be increased to prevent further economic crises. However, 'manpower' was in short supply because not all men had returned from the war, national service had been extended because of the Korean war and the numbers of young people entering employment had fallen as the school-leaving age rose (Addison:1985). Putting all these factors together it became clear that the biggest pool of untapped labour was married women's labour, the new '*boom economy needed them: to produce, to earn, to spend*' (Gilbert:1985:54). The result was that women were again encouraged to enter the employment market – in the national interest.

Looking at this from a working-class North East perspective, at the beginning of their study, Miller *et al* (1960) state that employed mothers were '*a new phenomenon on Tyneside*' (p10) because only a few mothers worked outside the home and those that did had to do so from economic necessity rather than choice. Towards the end of the study the number of mothers working outside the home had increased, particularly after children had started school. Miller *et al* (1960) sound a note of caution concerning this change, '*if the employment of mothers with young children becomes firmly established in our society, it will undoubtedly have a marked effect upon family life*' (p10).

Others took up this caution, thus the employment of married women was far from universally accepted despite the country's economic needs. Indeed, the employment of married women remains controversial. Because employed mothers had been used as a scapegoat for social problems such as broken homes and juvenile delinquency, Smith (1961) posed the question: '*Is the wife's employment a disadvantage for*

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*family life?*' (p12). The controversy is further compounded by the fact that employers were reluctant to engage married women on the grounds that their first loyalty was to their families; therefore women were not committed employees.

Thus, in the early 1950s two powerful lobbies were vying for women's attention: on the one hand there was a requirement to replenish the population and on the other there was a requirement to replenish the economy. When looked at more closely, these two lobbies share the same underlying rationale – the national economy. The childhood experiences of the mature women reflect this divide with seven of them having full-time mothers, four having mothers who worked full-time, and one whose mother worked part-time.

In terms of full-time motherhood, Joanne's mother left work to have her first child and never returned in 40 years. Kate believes it was the norm for mothers to be at home, that's what she and her friends saw all around them, and Janet always thought her mother was happy in that role. Tracy's mother simply didn't like the idea of going out to work; it wasn't something that women of her generation thought about. In terms of employment, Susan's mother was a teacher, and Sarah's "*mum always worked*" (266). Bridget's mother went to work and Elizabeth's mother prized her financial independence. Elizabeth thinks that "*how the mothers are, it really has an effect on the ... daughters*" (206-214).

Thus, in the traditional social order of the mature women, although traditional sex-roles persisted, a gap began to appear as the images of companionate marriage, the new man and the active, working woman became more common. In effect there came to be '*two feminine ideals, two distinct ways of life, [which] continue uneasily side by side*' (Myrdal & Klein:1956:10).

Early familial experiences constitute but one thread of aspirational/expectational development. The next major milestone in young people's lives is their education and in the next chapter Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy talk about their educational experiences.

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## **Chapter Five**

### **1960s Schooldays – The Best Days of Our Lives**

***It made me gladsome to be getting an education, it  
being like a big window opening. And out of that  
window who knows what you metna see?***

(Webb: Precious Bane)

In the early to mid-1960s Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Liz, Sarah and Janet made their way to secondary school and in this chapter the mature women and I talk about aspects of their educational experience. My concern is not with the early years of schooling, important though these undoubtedly are, rather I will concentrate on secondary education, the latter stages of which being the period when the mature women were preparing for the transition to adult life.

In Chapter Two I briefly touched on the importance of the 1944 Education Act and it is necessary to mention this Act again now because it is largely through the auspices of this Act that the mature women had four years of secondary education at all.

In 1943, the White Paper '*Educational Reconstruction*' proposed that all children should receive secondary education to develop their talents, talents that were vital for the nation's economic recovery. The resulting 1944 Education Act established free secondary education for all based on each child's needs and abilities. The question is: Who decides what those needs and abilities are, based on what criteria? Underpinning these questions is a far more fundamental one – what is the purpose of education? Newsom (1948) explicitly links education with adult life by saying that '*it is difficult to see how the preliminary training of children can be divorced from the life they will probably lead*' (p11). Thus, links between education, employment and adult roles are clearly established. But again, who decides what adult roles a person will undertake and why?

Under the 1944 Education Act a tripartite educational system was established where grammar schools equipped pupils for higher education and middle-class occupations,

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technical schools prepared pupils for skilled working-class employment and modern schools prepared the majority of pupils for unskilled labour (Westergaard & Little:1970).

The route into these schools was the eleven-plus examination, a selection test of mental ability. The eleven-plus was initially believed to be fair and equitable because of its scientifically objective development and because it was grounded in the theory that ability is a fixed commodity, unaffected by social determinants such as teaching or environment (Campbell:1956). On the basis that mental ability was fixed, diverse and unequal, *'differences in educational opportunities and, consequently, social disparities'* (Bisseret:1979:18) were justifiable, i.e. diverse social outcomes were natural. It is not hard to discover the basis for these beliefs, they are situated in prevailing theories of an individuated self containing predetermined attributes such as static and diverse ability levels, attribution theory and the motive to avoid success construct.

In practice, differences in educational opportunities meant that successful pupils went to grammar schools and the unsuccessful – the majority – went to secondary modern schools, consequently it is hardly surprising that modern schools quickly developed a negative image. By way of apology, Dent (1958) remarks that it was wrong to think of them as schools to which 'failures' were sent, rather they were schools *'to which all but a small minority of intellectually very able children go'* (p21), an exercise in semantics that failed to convince many pupils, teachers and parents.

Parents very quickly viewed the secondary schools as lacking prestige and did not want their children to attend them. In Miller *et al's* (1974) Newcastle study, parents were asked to list their school preferences for their children, *'the significant finding was the low prestige of the modern school which was given as a first choice by only 6 per cent of boys and 4 per cent of girls ... Modern school education in 1958, therefore, appeared the least desirable form of secondary education in the eyes of parents, reflecting a widespread and strongly held feeling that in some way it was inferior'* (p249).

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By the early 1960s, parental and professional uneasiness had grown into a vociferous lobby for educational equality, one outcome of which was the Labour government's Circular 10/65, which required local education authorities to submit plans for reorganising secondary education on comprehensive lines in an attempt to '*end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education*' (Lawson & Silver:1973:439), thus theoretically opening up opportunities for most pupils, although those in 'special' schools were one particular exemption from these widened opportunities. Comprehensive ideology seeks to bring together pupils of all abilities and the promotion of '*both higher overall educational attainment and more desirable social outcomes*' (Hillman:1994:329), but it was a long time coming with many local education authorities dragging their feet over implementation of the change.

This, then, is the background against which Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy transferred from primary to secondary education, a background in which overt educational rhetoric promoted the well-being and development of all pupils, whilst camouflaging political, industrial, economic, class and gender inequalities.

Only seven of the mature women mentioned the eleven-plus, and then but briefly, it didn't seem to evoke particularly strong memories for any of them. Tracy "*sat some sort of test at the junior school to get to it [the grammar school] ... it [the school] wasn't in the village where I lived ... it was like a few mile away*" (52-64). Susan nodded, she "*just passed the 11+ and it was the only school*" (69-71), that is, the only grammar school in her area. Joanne smiled and proudly asserted "*I was the only one in our family who'd ever passed the 11+, so I was the first one to go to grammar school*" (19-22). Joanne obviously views this as a particular personal achievement, which, being female and working-class, it was.

The difference between passing and failing the eleven-plus had a huge impact on life opportunities and self-esteem. Those who passed knew they were successful, teachers and parents alike praised them; they were the select few '*allowed to travel through the narrow gate at eleven, towards the golden city*' (Steedman:1985:119).

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This feeling of self-worth is evident in Joanne's comments and the smile on her face as she told me she was the first in her family to attend grammar school.

But what of those who were unsuccessful? They were relegated to one of the lowest forms of educational provision – secondary modern education – only special schools were rated lower than this. I failed the eleven-plus and went to a secondary modern school where the one thing we all had in common was this sense of failure, the sense that we weren't important, we weren't going anywhere, therefore no one need bother themselves about us. Bridget and Jane also failed. I asked Bridget if she remembered taking the eleven-plus. *"I knew there was a, like, a erm, exam papers in front of you ... You had to be quiet ... Very quiet. I don't know what was on the papers like, I can't remember"* (27-36). Jane's experience is slightly different, *"I failed my 11+, went to secondary modern and then at 13 transferred across to the comprehensive which was the best thing I did"* (180-182).

The intersection of education and sex-role discourses positions pupils, not only in a particular type of school, but also in the particular niche of the social hierarchy that logically follows (Berger & Berger:1972), whether we knew it or not, for pupils of my generation, the eleven-plus constituted one of the most decisive events of our lives. What we didn't know was that the education system was so constituted that the majority of us were bound to fail. It wasn't possible for everyone to have a grammar school education or high-status occupation. There had to be people who would perform manual, unskilled tasks, and rather more of the latter than the former, so the education system itself is the 'sorting hat', to borrow Rowling's (1997) phrase, of an occupational hierarchy with strong links to political, industrial, economic, class and gender discourses. In Dent's (1958) view *'no other single feature in the English educational system caused ... a tithe of the trouble, anxiety, heartache, discouragement and downright misery as did the 11+ '* (pp162-3), although perhaps – as in Jane's case – transfer to a comprehensive school may have done something to alleviate the inequity of the tripartite system.

I have suggested that being female and working-class were barriers to educational equality. I say this because social class did influence the type of school attended in that most grammar schools were located in middle-class areas, not in working-class

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areas (Douglas:1964), and parents did not have the right to send their children to schools outside their designated catchment areas. In addition, contrary to previous psychological rhetoric, it had been shown that ability could be influenced by environment and learning, i.e. a child's 11+ score could be increased with extra coaching and generally it was middle-class parents who could afford the extra coaching required.

Elizabeth made another connection between social class and parental expectations, *"if you're from a middle class family, if both your parents are in very good jobs, you've got much more opportunity I think, if you're a girl or a boy because your parents expectations, if they've done well for themselves, if they've applied themselves, they're certainly gonna expect you to do the same, whether you're a boy or a girl. And so, social, like, environment, how you're brought up, like if you're in a, erm, in a, a rich family as opposed, you know. You know, your parents expect you to do more and, and you probably will"* (719-727).

In addition to class, gender also acted to disadvantage girls. It was known that girls scored higher than boys in the 11+ (Goldstein:1987); therefore they should have had more grammar school places. However, in areas where there was the same number of male and female grammar school places, the girls' scores were weighted differently to boys' *'so that girls achieved fewer places than their results demanded, and boys were awarded more places than their results merited'* (Skelton:1993:329). Because girls' natural future lay in domesticity, they would have to be awarded fewer grammar school places, otherwise their educational success might raise their aspirations and seriously challenge the established social order.

Thus, being intelligent, female and working-class was an aspirational triple-bind. However, these are not factors that a child explicitly registers, of more immediate concern is their day-to-day school experience, so what was school like for the mature women?

Tracy and Emma enjoyed going to school and Sarah *"never wanted not to go"* (13-14). Kate said that discipline at her school was strict, but she didn't mind that, she enjoyed her time there and Joanne exclaimed enthusiastically that she *"had a big*



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*group of friends there, boys and girls, got on really well with the teachers, er, I was deputy head girl in the 6<sup>th</sup> form. I just had a blast at school. I loved it” (73-75).*

Bridget went to *“like a special school ... for people that were, well, backward, you know... I was really back with my er, well it’s maths now, rithmetic when I went to school. And that’s what it was, my rithmetic.* Nevertheless, I asked her if she had enjoyed school. *“Oh, I loved it ... I had a good teacher” (51-61).*

Kate remembers some of her teachers being *“really good. Like I say, there was discipline but you had fun as well. It wasn’t all doom and gloom. It was erm, they made it fun, but you knew how far to go ... But I mean, we, like I say, it was strict but not to the extent of them making your life, ill, you know” (76-87).* It could be argued that it was fun for Kate because she was a good girl, that is feminine and educational discourses positioned her as a compliant, obedient female. Sarah was also positioned as a good student, but in her case she earned this position by utilising traditional male behaviours. She worked hard and enjoyed the competition involved in maintaining her top of the class position. Utilising these male behaviours was a cause of conflict for Sarah in that she found there was a price to pay for her achievements and popularity with teachers, *“I got on really well with most of [the teachers]. But that also earned me ‘teacher’s pet’. No, I wasn’t popular with most of the others in the class. But I didn’t care” (41-64).* Did Sarah sacrifice femininity and social success through her pursuit of academic achievement?

Occasionally, some teachers appear to have encouraged girls in non-traditional subject areas. Jane told me about a parents’ evening and an encounter between her parents who didn’t support her science education – and a teacher who did. *“I can remember some teachers getting quite frustrated I think about, erm ... in particular a guy who taught physics ... and I can remember ... my parents going to see my form teacher and him saying, you know ‘Well, why doesn’t Jane seem to get the encouragement at home for physics and maths?’ cause he taught both. And I, I’m quite good at maths. And er ... I can imagine my dad just shrugging his shoulders. Because it wasn’t, it, it just wasn’t important” (307-316).*

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On the other hand, there were teachers who actively discouraged girls' non-traditional subject choices. Liz was the *"only female in a class of lads. I did ... maths, chemistry and physics. Erm, always surrounded by lads so was very vocal because I ... kept being shoved to the side, which I hated"* (12-48). Liz was determined to complete the course and tackled the physics teacher head on – another example of utilising typically male behaviour, *"He was very male chauvinistic and we had some beautiful battles. We would, we would be found screaming at each other ... he kept saying 'Girls don't do ...', and that was enough for me"* (12-48).

Elizabeth was disruptive in class too, as a reaction to the teacher's attitude, *"When I said to one of the teachers that I was gonna go to college ... he didn't, he had his favourite ... and er, I don't think he thought I would amount to much. Mind, I used to work meself in his class. I did. ... I was a right, oh I was terrible. But I used to just wind him up, you know... And I think I did make maybe the last two or three months of me life a bit of a misery. But it was just because he had that attitude towards me"* (274-287). Elizabeth pinpoints teacher attitude as the main cause of her disruptive behaviour, but at the same time she blames herself for the misery she experienced, perhaps experiencing guilt at contravening the passive, compliant behaviour expected of females. However, Elizabeth wasn't disruptive in every class, *"I mean, me maths teacher, I remember he used to say, you know, 'You can do this'. I used to, I liked the maths teacher ... So I think it's important how, you know, you have one-to-one with the teachers"* (294-298).

Liz and Elizabeth's active resistance is one response to pupil-teacher constructions of appropriate female behaviour; another is passivity. Emma told me about a maths teacher who had upset her and her passive response, *"I wasn't very good at maths ... and erm, ... he didn't bother with me. He says, 'Oh you might as well go and do extra typing lessons' ... he didn't even put me through for my maths exam ... I was upset. I was shocked. Erm, but of course I didn't go home to my parents to say that he wasn't, erm, giving me my, you know, doing my maths, or anything like that. I mean, I don't know why, whether they would have blamed me for it, I don't really know ... it was just, 'Oh, you're not very good at maths, I'm not gonna bother with you, you're not', you know, 'you're wasting my time. Go and do extra typing*

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*lessons'. And then I went there and of course, the typing teacher just accepted that"* (25-43).

Emma felt powerless to resist the authority of this teacher, and so too, it would seem, did the typing teacher. And yet, Emma wasn't always passive, in a different situation with her parents she demonstrates her capacity for resistance, *"I wasn't that, you know, really that brainy erm, when I was 15 you could still leave school then. Well, me mam and dad wanted me to leave then, cause I wasn't all that good. But I wanted to stop on ... And I was really upset. And that's the only, more or less, time in my school life that I've been really strong and I've, and I went to my headmistress and erm, she wrote a letter to my parents to say, 'I think', you know, 'it would help if Emma stayed on'. So they let me stay on another year and then I got me exams. I proved them right, but of course I didn't get through me maths or anything"* (140-152). And she knows that this was resistance – that she was strong on this occasion and that through resistance she achieved her goal.

What these examples demonstrate is that individuals do not have passive or resistant personalities, rather passivity and resistance are constructs called into being by the context and the people one is interacting with.

As the mature women's accounts have shown, teachers' behaviour and attitudes impact on how girls learn their place in both the education system and the social hierarchy. Spender (1982), Deem (1978) and Stanworth (1989) - to name but three - have discussed teachers' discriminatory practices whereby lessons are directed to boys more than girls, making the classroom experience a male experience, one that *'duplicates the patterns of the wider society'* (Spender:1982:59). Where boys display aggression and demand attention, their behaviour is acknowledged and rewarded, if only by virtue of the fact that they have gained the teacher's attention. When girls display aggression and demand attention – as Liz and Elizabeth did – they are censured as being 'unladylike'! Boys may be described as disruptive, but there isn't an equivalent word to unladylike for boys! Perhaps the most worrying aspect is that most of the teachers in the above work didn't realise they were being discriminatory; they genuinely believed that they were treating all pupils equally.

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The mature women have been talking about teachers' attitudes in relation to particular subjects and gender. Accepting the premise that education prepares young people for their adult lives, what subjects did they study, were they free to choose what subjects they studied and are their subject choices markers for what they aspired/expected to do when they left school?

Tracy said "*you had needlework, cooking and art and I couldn't do any of them ... actually, there was, erm, engineering drawing, cause the lads used to do engineering drawing and I wanted to do that and they wouldn't let us*".

Why wouldn't they let you? I asked.

*"Cause women had to do cooking or sewing. And I didn't like either. I'm just not that way inclined at all and I would have been much better in engineering drawing but they wouldn't let us. So I took needlework and hated it and after the first year I knew I was wasting me time and I asked them if I could drop it and they said I couldn't"* (82-98).

I had to smile; oh how I hated needlework and cookery. My rock cakes certainly lived up to their name! But, like Tracy, I had no choice, those were the subjects that girls did.

Elizabeth took typing, but "*the thing was that when I did typing, you had to do shorthand and commerce as well which was compulsory if you did typing ... erm, I had to do that I didn't necessarily want to do, but you know, to do the typing. I remember I had to give the biology up ... you couldn't, you only had a few options available to you*" (23-31).

As Tracy and Elizabeth have illustrated, subject choice was extremely limited. Newsom (1948) remarks that most women '*will become the makers of homes, and that to do this successfully requires the proper development of many talents*' (p110). He then genteelly seeks permission to advise his readers of what 'every wife should know and be able to do', a simplified, reduced version of which looks something like this:

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- principles of nutrition, practice of food preparation and cookery, use of home produced foods
  - allocation of housekeeping money on foods providing a balanced diet
  - planning daily, weekly work
  - maintenance of simple accounts, estimate expenditure, live within income
  - knowledge of principles and functioning of heating and lighting apparatus, perform simple repairs
  - awareness of importance of proper sanitation, ventilation and water supply
  - exercise taste in choice of furniture, equipment and decoration
  - competent in needlework and dressmaking and other domestic crafts
  - elementary first aid
  - knowledge of the care of infants and the normal processes which precede their arrival

To paraphrase Miss Elizabeth Bennet (Austen (1813:1978)), I'm surprised at Mr Newsom knowing any accomplished young wives at all! Nevertheless, Newsom was particularly influential in determining curriculum content and in turn what constituted appropriate male and female subjects.

Ten of the mature women indicated favourite/least favourite subject preferences. Only three said they did *not* like maths, whereas five said they enjoyed maths and science-related subjects. In terms of the more traditional female subjects, four of the mature women said they enjoyed needlework and cookery, typing and shorthand, whereas only one said she did not like needlework and cookery. Thus, the mature women's subject likes and dislikes do not appear to split along conventional male/female lines and become yet another source of conflict in cases where they were forced to do subjects they didn't like.

One cannot think of subject choices without thinking about examinations and qualifications. Only Kate, Sarah and I did not take any exams. Sarah, like me, didn't take exams because her secondary modern did not offer them. Kate didn't take any exams because she *"got a job and left school ...I was given a hairdressing apprenticeship and I'd been working there on Saturdays and school holidays and*

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*things and thought, well, what's the point of staying on and getting exams when I can go out and earn a living, which also helps me mother as well. Erm, and that was it" (118-129).*

The other eight women who mentioned exams took a variety of 'O' level GCEs, 'A' level GCEs, CSEs and Royal Society of Arts (RSA) exams. Thus the majority of the mature women did leave school with some form of public examination, a fact I had not been expecting, possibly because of my own experiences.

The reason that many modern schools did not offer public examinations in the early 1960s was because their pupils were not considered to have the necessary academic ability, a rationale that was to be increasingly questioned. In 1958 the Beloe Committee was tasked to investigate the whole area of secondary qualifications. In its findings the Committee recommended the establishment of a Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) for pupils whose ability was deemed below that required for the GCE. The CSE was finally introduced in 1965 (Lawson & Silver:1973) and quickly demonstrated that modern school pupils did have the ability to be successful, a change that came too late for Sarah and me. The legacy for me, as for so many other women of my age who have eventually become mature students, is self-doubt, the struggle of an academic journey as a part-time adult returner with no qualifications, of the lost years that can never be clawed back in terms of career and the feelings of vulnerability and not being good enough that Lacey (2000) expresses so well.

So far the mature women and I have talked about educational selection, type of school attended, teachers' influence, subject choices and examinations. However, schools do not operate in a vacuum, many other influences are brought to bear on the educational experience, two of which are parents and peers.

Emma's parents insisted that she did her homework, but otherwise, *"They weren't, they used to come to parents' meetings. Well, me mother did. My dad never did. Erm, but otherwise I can't remember them being that much involved"* (126-136). On the other hand, Caroline's parents repeatedly said, *"You need to do well. If you don't do well in your ... school work, then you won't be able to get a good job". There was*

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*that sort of erm, advice going on all the time, but I was never forced. If I said 'I've done as much as I can, I can only do my best', then that's what my parents accepted. They took my word for it"* (133-140).

Joanne nodded, she was *"never pushed. My mum and dad always said 'Oh well, as long as you do your best, that's what's important'. So, at the time that was great, but in retrospect I always feel that if I'd had, I don't want to say more intelligent, but more aware parents, I could have had a bit more guidance and perhaps stricter pushing, I could have done a lot better for myself. Because I always thought 'Oh, well', you know, 'you're doing pretty well', because by what had gone before, it was pretty well"* (21-28). I didn't get encouragement of any kind. My mother's view was that time spent reading a book was time wasted, time that would be better spent doing housework.

Caroline and Joanne's parents appear to be providing positive support, and of course they may have believed that they were doing just that. Nevertheless, the support is unfocused and places the main responsibility on the girls' themselves. In her reflections Joanne shows an awareness of the need for more focused parental support.

In complete contrast, Jane's father wanted her to *"stay on at 6<sup>th</sup> form but I'd had enough. I wanted out. I'd, I'd had enough"* (197-199). Her father's rationale was that neither she nor her brother would ever work in a factory. Such a view was confusing for Jane because, *"Erm, I think there was still this presumption that for girls it, it wasn't so important"* (307-316). In Jane's case there are mixed messages, a rejection of the manual work role, emphasis on continued education, but of an unspecified nature geared towards an unspecified goal.

Important though parents are, it is possible that a young person's peers may be more influential than parents, both positively and negatively (Halpern:1997:1096).

Sarah and Liz experienced the negative effects of being different from their peers. Sarah, for example, liked being competitive at school but acknowledges that this was not normal feminine behaviour and that there was a price to pay in terms of not

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having many friends. And Liz remarks, *"Er, I think I was always sidelined as being a bit peculiar. Erm, I didn't mix with the same people ... There were little cliques and I wasn't quite in any of them. I just used to wander round... In ways it bothered me at the time, erm, looking back, it's just from the personality I've got ... Erm, people say 'overpowering', but I'm not. I'm independent, I know what I want"* (178-179 & 210-221).

Apart from the alienation Sarah and Liz have described, there are other ways in which peers can have a negative effect. Elizabeth reflected on 'silly' behaviour. *"So yes, I, I was a little bit silly really. It was thinking of the immediate, you know, being out wi your friends, you know, a big group of yer, having a laugh. You know, that was what you wanted to do. Schoolwork just didn't seem ..."* (307-329). Susan agreed, *"I think I was sort of seriously studying till about 13 and then er the crowd I used to walk home with were, you know, was all talking about pop music and boys, just natural growing up"* (19-21). Susan laughed and said there comes a time when you have to make decisions for yourself. *"You suddenly realise you're a, a person and, you know, you've got choices. And you, you don't know which way to go, do you? ... Like I was 'Do I stick with my clever friends and... go home and do my homework, or do I go with the... other crowd who have a much better time'"* (1387-1403).

Susan is asking a crucial question here. As a child grows older she is increasingly influenced by the norms, behaviours and aspirations of peers. The peer group determines what is appropriate and possible and, as wanting to belong is a strong human emotion, most people will conform to group norms to safeguard their group affiliation. Through conformity individuals internalize a *'highly specific image of what they believe is possible and proper for them to aspire to'* (Fincham & Rhodes:1988:232). It is very hard to stand outside the group and be different, which makes Sarah and Liz's resistance all the more remarkable and Susan and Elizabeth's conformity more understandable.

Elizabeth and Susan are articulating the *'core dilemmas of sexual and social identity'* (Lees:1987:177), which are powerful influences during adolescence. At this time, where girls see themselves as wives and mothers, this causes them to *'hold back, and*



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*increasingly to regard academic achievement as irrelevant in the future they anticipate' (Fincham & Rhodes:1988:232), thus girls' academic achievement deteriorates. Oakley (1972) relates this phenomenon to the 'double-bind hypothesis [where girls] may be both intellectually able and eager to do well academically ... but they are keenly aware of the fact that the adult female role embraces lower academic ability and achievement than the male' (p86).*

As Sarah and Liz have shown, the price of continuing academic achievement is perceived as loss of femininity and social success. Generally, girls will act dumb in the presence of boys who matter because in the social success stakes *'it doesn't pay for girls to be too bright'* (Spender:1982:81). If she expresses career aspirations girls may taunt her with lack of femininity (Lees:1987), and boys may see her as a competitive threat. In the traditional social order, the apparently timeless dichotomy of marriage or career continued to mean that the *'penalties of being different are too costly for any but the most obstreperous or stubborn'* (Thompson:1983:39) to contemplate.

As I have said, education is concerned with preparing young people for their adult lives and did much to reinforce and perpetuate gendered roles. Three of these women passed the eleven-plus and went to grammar schools; the rest failed and went to secondary modern schools, where the educational emphasis was on low-skilled, low-paid employment as a preface to the wife and motherhood. For the majority of working-class girls to aspire to careers – even if there had been the appropriate discourse through which to articulate such aspirations – would have been to challenge the traditional social order, which illustrates the political, industrial, economic, class and gender discourses underpinning and reinforcing educational discourse.

Within the education system, teachers and parents both reinforce and perpetuate feminine discourse through their expectations of appropriate subject choices, classroom behaviour and lack of focused help and support. In addition, peer group pressure becomes increasingly important, laying down another layer of what is acceptable female behaviour and attitudes. As most human beings want to belong, conformity to group norms is hard to resist. Susan and Elizabeth felt they had to

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choose between their schoolwork and their social lives, eventually succumbing to the group and letting their schoolwork slip. Sarah and Liz, on the other hand, chose their schoolwork – Liz was deemed odd by her peers, and Sarah castigated as a teacher's pet. For these two mature women the denigration only spurred them to greater efforts, but they are very much a minority in this.

Nearing the end of their schooldays, Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy have internalised the traditional female role as exemplified by beliefs about ability and social success, beliefs that were reinforced by home and school. As they are about to leave school, has their acceptance of and – in some cases – resistance to these discourses influenced their aspirations and expectations? Will they follow the traditional route into wife and motherhood or will resistance lead to alternative constructions?

In the next chapter we talk about what the mature women aspired to and expected of their adult lives.

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## Chapter Six

### 1960s/70s Crossroads

***... women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts ... and it is narrow-minded ... to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings ... It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.***

(Bronte: Jane Eyre)

As Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy prepare to leave school they have to make decisions concerning what they will do in their adult lives. Trying to make such decisions was perhaps more problematic for the mature women than for previous generations because of the social changes that were taking place in British society in a period that has come to be construed as the Swinging Sixties. In this chapter the mature women and I talk about the changing social scene, romance, and school and family influences in the preparation for adult life and their aspirations and expectations. At this major transition point, what were the mature women doing and thinking about in terms of their futures?

Susan laughed as she told me that she had got in with a less academic crowd who were more interested in boys and pop music than schoolwork. *“And er, and I used to listen to the Top Twenty from 11 till 12 on a Sunday night in me bedroom. I had a big old radio (laughs) (...) and I had to rig up an aerial out me bedroom window (laughs) with a coat-hanger (laughter)”* (30-44). Like me, she was listening to the pirate stations, Luxemburg and Caroline. Talking about pop groups, Sarah remembered that she liked *“all the scruffy, rebellious ones, (laughter) Rolling Stones. You know, the papers said ‘Mothers, would you let your daughter go out with this man, or something like that. And course mothers generally threw up their hands in horror and said ‘No’, that’s the ones I liked. None of this namby-pamby Beatles stuff. ‘I wanna hold your hand’!”* (129-138). If she’d been old enough she

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could have gone to the Odeon Theatre in Newcastle on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September 1964 and seen them for 12s 6d – or 62½p (Tyne Tees Television:1990:93).

The Swinging 60s was a time when one had to be ‘with it’ and an extremely important part of being with it meant having the latest fashions. Susan wanted *“makeup and I wanted records and I wanted high-heeled shoes (laughs) and stockings (...) I think, I remember getting my first pair of tights when I was 18 at college (...) they were lovely, you know, after you’d struggled with threepenny bits in your suspenders (laughter), and yank it out for your bus fare (laughter)”* (103-122). Having the latest fashions was OK, but one had to be ‘seen’ in them and the place to be seen in Newcastle was the Handyside Arcade (Tyne Tees Television:1990:96), where the ‘in crowd’ paraded their latest fashions, in much the same way as Goth fashions are paraded in Old Eldon Square today.

Public, social activities were integral to the swinging 60s; but this was a scene only fleetingly glimpsed by most of the mature women. Susan seems to be an exception even though she doesn’t think the scene was ‘swinging’ for her. *“The ‘swinging 60s’, they weren’t swinging for me. I mean, we used to, erm, (...) as soon as everybody’s parents went away and left them at home to do (...) their homework, you know, or revise for exams, we’d have an all-night party. Well, I went to loads of these all-night parties and me dad thought I was, erm, sleeping with people, you know, cause he used to say ‘You’re a good time girl, you’ (laughter). What’s wrong with it? I like having a good time. But you know, we’d sleep, like, 6, 6 in a room and, you know, you’d be in a sleeping bag or you and your mate would be, in a bed and there’d be 2 lads on the floor. You know, it was, and half of them had fallen asleep with glasses still in their hands (laughs). Erm, so I mean I don’t think we were ‘swinging’ at all. The only swinging thing was the music, it was lovely. And I mean, we were having a couple of drinks and smoking. I never had a joint, yet (laughs), but I know there were quite a few passed round”* (831-848).

This might not have been swinging for Susan, but it would have been for me. My parents never went away and neither I nor anyone else I knew went to all-night parties. Rather than swinging, the adolescent experience of most of the mature women and mine is more reminiscent of the 1950s, with limited social outlets and

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strict parental control. Tracy, for example, lived in a small village where there were very few social activities for young people; she went to the community centre dance about once every 4 or 6 weeks. Emma went to a dance once a week and the pictures. Her parents wanted to know whom she was going with, where she was going, and she had to be in by 10 o'clock. Emma sees this as protectiveness because she is a girl, a point made by Osgerby (1998) who maintains that parents tend to '*police their daughters' leisure more strictly than that of their sons*' (p56).

Policing leisure activities was taken to extremes by Sarah's parents. "*We weren't allowed out at nights,*" she said. "*A lot of the other girls used to go to the youth club, or just hang around street corners, but we weren't allowed to go out. At 14 I still had to be in bed at 7 o'clock (laughs)*" (361-374). Jane also laughed as she recalled: "*just wasn't allowed off the leash. I could go to, my, my parents weren't particularly (laughs) churchy but for some reason or other they seemed to believe that I should go to Sunday School. I think it was to get a couple of hours peace (laughs) on a Sunday afternoon (...) I think ... almost after I left school, I think that would be about the sum total*" (459-482). She collapsed with laughter as she described one incidence of paternal displeasure, "*God, I can remember (...) being late home. I'd been to the pictures and my dad was stood on the doorstep with a clock under his arm (laughter). It's true: 'What bloody time do you call this?' (laughter). It's true. And it was only 20 to 11. I had to be in for half past ten, and it was only 20 to 11*" (346-356).

Together with limited social outlets and strict parental control, the mature women may not have had much spare time for social activities anyway given that many of them were expected to undertake domestic and childcare tasks. Tweedie (1982) calls this '*chromosome exploitation, gender fascism, daughter colonization*' (p12) and although she is slightly tongue-in-cheek I suspect that serious intent underpins the comment. Because of domestic commitments, it seems likely that '*young women's leisure [is] qualitatively as well as quantitatively different from that of men*' (Osgerby:1998:56), although I find it difficult to understand how domestic and childcare tasks can be defined as 'leisure' in anything other than a time allocation sense, where leisure represents non-school time.

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During this period of social change there was more to life than music, fashion, all night parties and domestic chores. Susan and Sarah show an awareness of the political climate of the time. Susan mentioned the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). *“Erm, I’m a pacifist, I hate violence, and it was, it was the ‘in’ thing to be, wasn’t it, you know, your little badge. I had some CND earrings (...) The Aldermaston marches and things (...) I mean, if I hadn’t had kids I would have gone to the er, what was its name? Where the women were, the green? (...) Greenham Common, yes. But I mean, I had a mortgage to pay and kids to look after, the timing was wrong”* (850-863).

At first Sarah laughingly said she had wanted to be a rebel, but then she became more serious, *“Erm, actually that wouldn’t have been so very surprising given that it was the mid-60s. It seemed to be expected of us somehow. Vietnam, student riots, protest songs, CND, ban the bomb. But what we got was the glossy version, in magazines, on the telly, at the cinema. It looked exciting, rather than bloody and inhuman, that’s erm, on reflection, looking back, isn’t it?”* (150-157).

Regardless of the populist tone of being the ‘in’ thing to do, there is a serious message here too. Youth protest was a revolt against existing political institutions, the education system and the family, and threatened the degree of control parents and teachers could exercise over young people’s attitudes and behaviour. Young people began to realise that they didn’t have to accept or perpetuate existing social practices; they saw the possibility of constructing alternative life styles. This is not to suggest that established practices disappeared over night, nor even over a decade. As Wetherell *et al* (1987) remark, *‘Egalitarian discourse does not magically wipe out non-egalitarian discourse’* (p66). On the contrary, for the majority of women established social customs continued to be the norm. For example, Susan, at a later stage in her life, wanted to participate in the Greenham Common protests, but felt unable to do so because she had a mortgage to pay and children to look after. In other words, by this time she was thoroughly enmeshed in traditional female and family roles and didn’t see a way of resisting; therefore she put her own aspirations aside, as to follow them would have made her a bad wife and mother.

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Although most of the mature women did not directly participate in the social changes taking place at this time, there was another change taking place that they couldn't ignore, their biological development, and part of this change involved boyfriends. Most of the girls Sarah knew "*wanted boyfriends. They thought about having a good time for a couple of years and then getting married. I don't think many of them actually wanted kids but knew that they would end up with them. It didn't really seem to be an option*" (196-209). Liz had a boyfriend and "*it was all lovey-dovey and we were going to get engaged and we were going to get married. But I was still going to go to university*" (242-247), which suggests that having a boyfriend and going to university might not be compatible. However, the *tone* in which Liz said it suggests that she was going to university, boyfriend or no boyfriend.

Boyfriends are important because they represent romantic love which is closely allied to feminine ideology. In Sharpe's (1994) study having a boyfriend signalled '*social success and status, a secure symbol of acceptable femininity*' (p259). However, McRobbie (1991) points out that '*romance is not an unproblematic category ...its central contradiction ... is based round the fact that the romantic moment, its central tenet, cannot be reconciled with its promise of eternity*' (p98).

In fairytales girls fall in love, get married and live happily ever after. Everything is – to use Liz's phrase – 'lovey-dovey'. However, is romantic love enough to sustain a marriage through all its inevitable trials and tribulations? Just how can cooking, cleaning and changing dirty nappies be regarded as romantic? More to the point – who has responsibility for these tasks? As I have noted in Chapter Four, in the experience of the mature women, females were responsible for these tasks. Looking at their mothers and other women around them, romance seemed to disappear and marriage proves to be '*a kind of trap*' (Gavron:1966:131) where love diminishes '*within the confines of mortgages and domesticity*' (Comer:1982:178). Nevertheless, the romantic discourse is so sirenian that each woman sees herself as the '*magnificent exception, the one who will rise above it all*', (Grymes 1996 p20).

Of course, romance does not have to lead to marriage and motherhood, although this was the usual outcome before the concept of 'free love' provided the alternative constructions of cohabitation and sex outside of marriage. The concept of 'free love'

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introduces a subject often implied but rarely explicitly articulated in romantic discourse, as Liz puts it “*we discovered sex as well, which is all very off-putting*” (365-375). Girls’ ‘discovery’ of sex unleashes waves of anxiety about reputation, pregnancy and contraception.

Susan recalls the reaction to a teenage pregnancy at her school, “*It was shaming as well, you know (...) somebody in the high school had to leave because she was pregnant and it was, you know, so much gossip and, oh, it was horrible, but, one of the teachers I really liked said ‘Well, it’s just, it’s just a misfortune’. It could have happened to any of us, you know. She, she brought me down to level cause everybody else was saying it was naughty, you know*” (480-489).

To be pregnant outside of marriage was naughty because such sexual behaviour breaks the rules of what constitutes the good woman. It flies in the face of male authority, the legitimate controller of female sexuality and raises the possibility of women making their own decisions about their sexuality. No doubt there have been women in every era who have become pregnant outside of marriage, however, I think what made the 1960s so different in this respect was the introduction of the contraceptive pill. One could argue that the pill condoned and encouraged non-marital sex; on the other hand one can argue that the pill prevented the misery of unwanted pregnancy. One can argue that it was liberatory – despite adverse health effects only articulated later – in that it did enable women to make their own decisions about their sexuality, and on the other hand one can argue that it served to subordinate women by placing them under increased pressure to engage in sexual activity. The introduction of the contraceptive pill was highly controversial and remains so today.

Susan said she probably first learned about the contraceptive pill through reading her mother’s magazines, “*cause, I mean, it wouldn’t be on TV much then. Well in fact, there wasn’t much, sort of, knowledge, was there? (...) mam used to get erm Woman’s Realm, I probably read about it in there (...) But er I don’t think any of my friends were on it before they were 18 anyway. I just think it wasn’t, it wasn’t a thing you could ask for (...) I wouldn’t have dared to go to my own GP cause me mother*



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*knew him, you know, he was a, like, family friend. They were then, weren't they?"* (518-534).

The contraceptive pill was a hugely significant development, potentially giving women control over not only their sexuality, but over their own fertility as well, for the first time in history. Initially unmarried women had no access to the pill because it would have been seen as condoning non-marital sex. However, in 1964 the Brooke clinics in London began offering the pill to single women (McRobbie:1991) and in 1966 the Family Planning Association changed its policy on the basis that promiscuity was a lesser evil than unwanted pregnancy (Wilson:1980:100). Then in 1969 the National Health Service started to provide single women with birth control advice and prescribed them the pill (Gottlieb IR12).

Joanne thinks that girls of her generation were more frightened of pregnancy than sexual disease, she *"chose to go on the pill at 17. And I mean I knew then this was not a choice my mother would ever have had, so I knew there was a lot more sexual freedom because of the availability of contraception and what not. Basically that was an indicator of the change in times, you know, I knew that the times I was in then were very different to what had gone before, you know, just a decade, 15 years ago"* (802-810).

Regardless of the fact that contraception was becoming more readily available, Bridget expressed a view that probably represents how a great many women continued to feel about sex at that time. *"I was frightened (laughs). Yer kna, I mean, we, we carried on with the lads and things like that but, I'd, er I would, I would be frightened, yer kna. I think it was the idea of getting pregnant (...) And I said 'No'. I'd rather save meself till I got married, which I did (...) I'd a few friends that gave in to their boyfriends before, yer kna. I thought 'Oh well, that's up to them'. I mean, you know, I always, 'he'll leave you, if you, he'll finish with you. Don't give in to him', you know (...) I think you're more, were more respected for that, so, aye"* (388-405).

The women illustrate the multiple fears females experienced with regard to engaging in sexual intercourse: there is the fear and shame of becoming pregnant, there is the

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theoretical availability of contraception, combined with the fear of approaching one's GP, official controller of public morality and there is the lack of real knowledge about contraception particularly '*for the young and unmarried*' (Rowbotham:1999:360).

At the time the mature women were leaving school, the introduction of the pill probably had very little impact on their lives. True, they were in their mid-teens and could have been sexually active, but – and it's a big but – such deep-rooted behavioural change takes time to permeate society. Thus, even in the permissive 60s it was not '*so easy to cast off the punitive attitudes towards sexual freedom simply by willing them to dissolve*' (Rowbotham:1999:365), which is why Bridget's view is probably a more accurate indicator of how many women felt at that time.

And so, Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy were caught up in their emotional and physical development and in a rapidly changing society. Into the midst of this whirlpool flowed a third river of change, the impending end of their schooldays.

Only three of them spoke about this directly. Elizabeth was frightened, "*You know, you had, you were just about to leave school. What were you going to do? But you hadn't thought like that. You started to think like that because ... you had been surrounded by friends and you had a laugh and a talk, and suddenly everybody was like, drifting away and, and it was funny actually, weird. Then you were self-conscious then, you know*" (315-329). Emma agreed, "*Actually I was quite nervous about going out into the big wide world as they called it because I didn't feel as if I'd had an, any experience. Well I hadn't. But, it was such a thing, I wish I had have been (...) so I was really nervous as anything about going out, you know*" (229-238).

Tracy summed up these feelings by saying, "*You were just like, you were at school one day and the next day, you weren't. 'And now what shall I do?' It was exactly like that. I never thought once about what was going to happen when I left school*" (1152-1154). That was my experience too. When I was fifteen I left school on Friday and started work in a factory on Monday, childhood had fled, and the future looked very scary.

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Elizabeth, Emma, Tracy and I considered ourselves to be ill-prepared for adult life, not realising that our families and schools had surreptitiously prepared us for certain adult roles. I'm going to return to school and family influences and look more specifically at how they prepared females for employment.

Elizabeth acknowledges that she could have done better at school but she just wasn't interested and neither, it seems, were the teachers, "*There was maybe a bit of apathy then. And if you weren't in that 'O' level grade, you know, maybe they didn't erm, I think you just went to school and you, and the bell went, and you came home*" (151-155).

Although Liz was academically bright, she received mixed messages from her teachers, "*The maths teacher wanted me to go on and do maths. Erm, he said I was doing well with it. Er, the physics teacher kept saying I wasn't going to go on and do physics*" (laughter) (328-334). In Liz's view girls "*were allowed to do the 6<sup>th</sup> form but you weren't allowed to go any further. You weren't expected to go any further than that*" (336-341). However, Liz had a highly developed sense of her own worth, therefore she was better equipped to deal with these contradictions than most.

Tracy didn't have the same resilience. There is some bitterness in her feelings of being let down by teachers, "*not one teacher said to me 'with your grades, you should stay on and do 'A' levels' (...) I think some of the teachers should have said, you know, like someone. Or if, if you were in the top 5 or something, they should have said 'Well, why are you leaving to go to college to do shorthand and typing? Surely you should be staying on doing your 'A' levels?' But me mam and dad were quite pleased I decided I went to college. They said I could go to college for a year and they thought that was really good for a woman in those days. Which it isn't now, but, you know*" (118-139).

Teachers, wittingly or unwittingly, provide advice on future options, but schools also provide guidance through the formal structure of careers guidance, a service that has its roots in the 1945 Ince Report which recommended the setting up of a central Youth Employment Service.

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On the whole, the mature women weren't particularly impressed with their experience of this service. Kate remembers that girls could *"take shorthand and typing, commerce or accounts. Erm, things like that which I presume would help you along in an office job if that's what you wanted to do. But there was no actual career guidance, if you know what I mean"* (44-53).

Emma felt that she didn't have a voice, *"we'd talk about what we want and then she'd say yes or no. You can go for that (...) They sort of made the decisions for you. There was no, erm, 'Go on, go on, try and make up your own mind'"* (67-85). Sarah agreed, *"I think we had one meeting with a careers woman. She said something like 'Have you thought about what you want to do when you leave?' If you said 'Yes, work in an office', she said 'Fine'. If you said 'No', she said 'Well, you should think about work in offices, factories and shops'. And that was it. Those were the choices. Which I guess was what was expected of us anyway. So it didn't seem limiting"* (211-222).

If Sarah seemed resigned to limited choice and lack of voice, Tracy wasn't, she was quite angry. *"It was never mentioned about having a career. We had one careers woman came to school once, (...) if you'd been a woman you could have gone in and said anything, 'I'm gonna be a stripper and they would've said 'Yes'. You could have said anything cause they weren't interested. Do you know what I mean? (...) at the time I come out and thought 'Well, that was a waste of time' (...) Cause I went in and said 'I'm gonna be a secretary' and they said 'Oh good – get yourself away' ... So if you said you were going to work in an office they didn't want to see you. Ridiculous really"* (561-581).

Caroline went to her meeting willing to place her confidence in the advisor's expertise. However, with hindsight, she conceded that she was naïve to do so, *"Well, I think that when you are at that age (...) you go along and you think that you, these people that you're talking to really do know what, you just assume. I never questioned or looked into. I suppose I was too naïve at that particular age"* (97-103). As for Bridget and Joanne, they received no careers guidance at all.

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Initially local authorities had no guidelines and they were not compelled to adopt a uniform procedure, *'they lack power [and are] dependent upon voluntary notification of vacancies from employers'* (Miller *et al*:1974:274). It was only after April 1974 that local education authorities were obligated to assist young people to identify appropriate employment and the training required for that employment. The key word here is 'appropriate' – would a more uniform procedure have provided girls with any radically different advice from that they were already receiving? By the time the service was regularised the mature women had left school therefore the changes – however speculative – were of no benefit to them.

Of course, it could be argued that if women were expected to become wives and mothers, then careers advice was largely irrelevant, that any job would do prior to marriage (Payne:1980). The concept of being a career woman **and** wife and mother – being a 'Superwomen' (Conran:1975) was an alien concept, though not altogether unknown. Myrdal & Klein (1956), in their appraisal of career opportunities for women, optimistically remark that although combining *'a career and a family may be difficult at present ... it is already less so than it was thirty years ago, and it is likely to become easier as time goes on'* (p123). A decade later when the mature women were leaving school, the time of the career woman still had not arrived. The prospects for the mature women seemed, in many ways, to mirror those of their mothers.

If careers advice from school was limited, what advice did they receive from their parents? Jane's father encouraged her to continue her education. In retrospect she thinks he was wrong but at the time she felt powerless to resist him, *"And of course when your parents are sort of saying to you 'I think you should go this way', at 13, 14, and for my generation, it was very, very difficult, if not impossible to book them. Erm, you did as you were told, unless you were a very, very naughty girl. And I wasn't. Not then. I mean I am now (laughs), not then (laughter)"* (285-300).

Kate wanted to be a nurse, but her father said *"'That's no life for a young girl', and sent us off to typing school. And I didn't want to be locked in an office all day. So I had this opportunity of doing hairdressing, which I did, and hated. Erm, there was*

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*quite a few of us wanted to be nurses. There was one or two wanted to be teachers and the rest (...) I think most of us ended up (...) doing office work" (134-167).*

Liz's father tried to steer her, but in an indeterminate way, *"Erm, I looked around and pharmacy was the one. I thought 'Oh, that's a bit of a 'gentle' subject. I can earn money'. Erm, my father kept saying 'Oh, you could do better, you could do better'" (57-64),* but he didn't expand on what he meant by 'better'.

Elizabeth's mother was a typist, *"and she wanted me to have a secure job and she was thinking of me going in that direction. Erm, and then I, I sort of started doing things really that ... I, I don't think I wanted to do it, but I think me mam was basically thinking when you leave school do, you know, do what I done (...) And I don't blame her for getting the subject wrong" (20-23 & 33-38).*

Jane, Kate, Liz and Elizabeth received advice in terms of what their parents considered to be suitable employment for women, rather than their parents taking account of what they wanted. In Susan and Sarah's case, parental concern centred on family finances; Susan's father assumed *"that I would leave as soon as I, I could, you know, and contribute towards the family, cause that's what everybody did then, you know, put money into the house" (266-268).* Sarah's experience was similar, *"Get a job, bring some money in. Money was always a topic in our house, cause there wasn't much of it (...) I was the oldest and at that time there was only dad's wages, so the sooner I started bringing some money in the better, that's what they said, like, all the time" (224-235).* These parental pressures, linked to economic circumstances, are very difficult to contest.

In complete contrast, Janet wasn't steered in any particular direction. However, she found herself reflecting on her mother's life and deciding that her own future was going to be different, *"Er, it was just, that's what mum's did then. And I was gonna do something else. I was, I was gonna have a career and everything which, er, was a fairly new thing, I think, then" (30-32).*

As young people start to think about their adult lives they often envisage futures similar to those of the significant others around them. The values that parents –

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particularly mothers - hold, for example, the standards they set and the support they provide are considered to be particularly important in a girl's aspirational/expectational development (Clausen:1991). Where mothers are full-time homemakers and carers, the concept of women occupying positions of authority often has minimal impact on girls' own occupational choices because such role models are not experienced as significant others (Furlong:1986). Goldberg *et al* (1996) and Paludi (1992) suggest that mothers who are highly motivated towards paid employment provide positive role models for their daughters. However, Sewell *et al's* (1980) American evidence does not support this theory. In their opinion, if maternal employment has any influence at all, then it is economic rather than aspirational. Maternal influence can also operate in the opposite direction, as in Janet's case where - upon reflection - she wanted her life to be completely different to her mother's. In this sense her mother operates as a negative role model, one to be avoided if at all possible.

It's interesting that four of the mature women - Susan, Jane, Kate and Liz - acknowledge their fathers' influence more than their mothers'. Whilst parental influence tends to be same-sex, there is a tendency for girls who have professional or non-traditional career aspirations to attribute influence more to fathers than mothers (Furlong:1986). Although this may be true in Liz's case, it doesn't appear to be so for Susan, Jane and Kate. Their fathers wanted them to get traditional, safe office jobs. Perhaps this says more about these fathers' familial authority than it does about any intrinsic interest in their daughters' occupational futures.

The communications, attitudes and behaviours of teachers and parents have thus acted as signposts in the development of the next generation's lives. However, in the 1960s/70s it was difficult for young people to see the relevance of their teachers' and parents' experiences in the changing social context of their own lives. Of course there is always some degree of change between one generation and the next, this is how society grows and develops, but at this particular period the generational difference was greater than it had ever been before. In this changing climate, at the point in their lives when they were leaving school, what aspirations and expectations did Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy have for their futures?

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Taking aspirations to mean those things that a person is prepared to strive for, Liz aspired to be a pharmacist and Tracy aspired to have a job and always have money, it is the latter part concerning money that constitutes Tracy's aspirations, probably because as a child she and her family had very little money. Emma, Sarah and Kate did have aspirations, but influential adults dashed them. Emma remembers wanting to be an air hostess but "*Cause I'd worn glasses since I was ten I was told then 'Oh no, you can't, can't be an air hostess cause you wear glasses'"* (15-18). It was the career's teacher who told her this, a message that was reinforced by her father's insistence that she leave school and contribute some money to the household. Sarah empathised with this situation. She'd had vague ideas about being a teacher, but her parents had said no, she too had to get a job and bring some money in. Kate had wanted to be a nurse but her father said that was no life for a girl and sent her to typing school, even though she didn't want to be in an office all day.

On the whole the mature women express a lack of direction and didn't have any particular aspirations. Susan, Janet, Jane, Elizabeth and Bridget say they didn't think about the future much, they had no clear ideas about what they wanted to do and they didn't take the future seriously. Caroline perhaps sums up these non-directional feelings when she says girls were "*mixed up as what they wanted to do. I think everybody's in the same boat. Obviously you get the odd one or two people who have got complete direction on where they want to be. They've had a goal from the start. Whereas I was always mixed up and never really knew what I wanted to do. I think I was waiting until I excelled in something*" (laughs) (52-68). Tracy expresses a similar view, most of the girls in her class "*weren't even bothered where they were gonna go, in a factory, whatever, cause their main aim in life was to get married. They were just looking for a boyfriend and get married basically*" (141-146).

Given this lack of aspirational direction, what did the mature women expect of their adult lives? Having a job, getting married and having children were their primary expectations, regardless of the fact that some of them, Liz, Janet, Caroline and Tracy for instance, emphatically stated they had not wanted this. Kate presents a very bleak picture of what she thought her future would be, "*a girl's lot was, you got a job, you left school. You had that job for a while and then you got married, had kids and that*



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*was your life (smiles). You were left at home basically" (45-47), "you thought that was your lot and you just did it" (220-221).*

When they were talking about their aspirations and expectations, a number of insightful comments were made. Kate, for example, said that university was not an option for her, *"I mean, you were very, very lucky if you got to university" (134-167). "Don't forget, I mean, we were all working-class kids, you know. If you got to university you were privileged. Erm, I'm sure there are some who did get to university, erm, but it wasn't the norm" (173-190).*

So these mature women didn't consider continuing their education to be an option even though further/adult education was expanding in Newcastle – as elsewhere – with the establishment of the College of Further Education in 1964 to supplement the polytechnic and university (Newcastle Chronicle & Journal:1998). Without a college or university education it would have been difficult to pursue a career, which may be one reason why the majority of the mature women had no clear career aspirations.

But more than this, Jane and Janet believe that women have little control over what happens in their lives. In a pensive voice Jane remarked, *"it's funny because it's not, a lot of time it's not what you want to do. I think as a woman a lot of the time your hand is actually forced" (249-251).* She came back to this theme again later, more forcefully, it seemed to me with a light of realisation, *"the path, as I say, is, is forced. That, that door is, is closed and, you know, you can't go through it. Somebody's locked it from the other side. You, you just, you just can't do that" (266-269).* On a similar theme, Tracy had a revelatory moment when we were discussing choice, the concept seemed to surprise her as – thinking about it – she realised, *"Well, I didn't actually choose. I didn't choose. I don't know. I just ended up, you know what I mean? No, I didn't actually choose, I didn't choose, I just ended up" (1175-1187).*

Choice is concerned with agency, with the capacity to initiate and take action, to make decisions and follow them through. It is one thing to contend that people are not simply passive creatures held in thrall by social institutions such as families and schools, that people are not totally determined by roles, rules or culture

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(Morgan:1988), it is quite another to contend that everyone has the capacity to take action, to contest social roles and rules. In most of the mature women's accounts there is a suggestion that contestation never entered their minds. The socialisation process invites girls to '*participate in social practice on given terms. The invitation may be, and often is, coercive – accompanied by heavy pressure to accept and no mention of an alternative*' (McLaren:1996:280).

In general terms, the path to adult life is made up of a complex of factors, some of the most important of which are '*the home environment and the selective processes of educational procedures*' (Maizels:1970:3). These factors suggest to the child the various options available to them as adults; options that are usually class and gender-bound.

Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy were preparing to leave school at a time of major social and personal change. The social changes presented them with possible alternative lifestyles which said 'you no longer **have** to be clones of your parents'. However, the personal changes they were undergoing meant that the lure of romance gathered momentum. The influence of boyfriends, marriage and children – those socially accepted markers of feminine achievement – increased in intensity.

As I listened to the mature women I had a feeling of sadness concerning the fatalism, inevitability and powerlessness many of them expressed, their perceived lack of freedom to choose their own paths. To be positive, some aspirations are to be found; for example, Liz aspired to be a pharmacist. However, there are also aspirations that withered before they had time to take root. Emma, for example, wanted to be an air hostess, Sarah, a teacher and Kate, a nurse, but they were thwarted in their ambitions by influential others and dominant discourses that serve to control women's lives. Aspirations, then, are in short supply. Janet thinks that girls were unfocused, and didn't take their futures seriously. The majority expected to get jobs and earn money before getting married and having children. As Kate said, this was what women did and you just got on with it, despite five of the mature women, Sarah, Liz, Janet, Caroline and Tracy, saying this was not what they wanted.

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Possibly because the mature women left school a number of years ago they were keen to talk about what has happened to them subsequent to leaving school. As these events were obviously important to the mature women, in the next chapter I have included some facets of their aspirational/expectational development as played out in the early years of their adult experience.

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## **Chapter Seven**

### **Actions Speak Louder**

***First and foremost, you are a wife and mother.***

***That I don't believe any more. I believe that first and foremost I am an individual, just as much as you are – or at least I'm going to try to be. I know most people agree with you, Torvald, and that's also what it says in books. But I'm not content any more with what most people say, or with what it says in books. I have to think things out for myself.***

(Ibsen: Four Major Plays)

As Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy were leaving school they express a lack of focus and a fatalism concerning their futures, thwarted aspirations, and expectations they didn't subscribe to. In this chapter we talk about what they actually did when they left school, as opposed to what they thought they might do. We talked about marriage and motherhood, about divorce and having to grow up, and we talked about employment, harassment and discrimination.

On leaving school, Susan thought she would be a teacher like her mother and began college. At college a romance blossomed and she married in her second year, and eventually completed her training. After college, Susan moved with her husband to accommodate his career and her teaching qualifications enabled her to find a job in her new location where she taught for two years. And then the motherhood mandate kicked in, *"I wanted a baby. So, I got pregnant, gave my notice in, lost the baby at 20 weeks, which was, wasn't very nice cause it was a proper birth, you know (...)* The next year I was pregnant again so, that's my son" (459-475).

The romance of marriage and motherhood quickly wore off because Susan found that motherhood was not the idyll it is reputed to be. *"I remember feeling ever so trapped when the kids were little, especially. I think that's why I did my Open*

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*University degree, cause he was out every night and I was, you know, put the baby to bed and then what do I do? Watch telly, do some knitting, have a glass of wine, it'd be cider then not wine, and look at myself in the mirror and think 'Hey, what's, what's this', you know, 'you're wasting away. You've got talent, you, you could be doing something'. So, that's when I, I thought 'Well, rather than get annoyed and fall out I'll channel my energies into a degree'" (989-997). Channelling her energies and anger into a degree was not enough to save her marriage, which ended in divorce. After her divorce Susan taught full-time and found it extremely difficult to combine work, home and family. After some time Susan remarried.*

Susan isn't the only one to find herself following a husband around the country. Jane *"joined the QA, Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corp"* (223-228). She finished her dental nurse training in the QA and then got married, *"and once you do that, everything goes up the creek"* (230-233). A marriage-bar meant that she was compelled to leave the forces on marriage, after which she had various part-time jobs as she followed her husband round the country. Accommodating her husband's career didn't save Jane's marriage either. After the birth of her son her marriage broke up and she went back to dental nursing full-time but like Susan, she also *"found it too much trying to run a home on your own with a youngster"* (235-239).

Reflecting on this period of her life Jane commented on some of the barriers she experienced and the way she felt about them. *"If you get a marriage split up like that for instance, erm, and you're left on your own with a pre-school child, your options are fairly limited. Erm, I mean for me, erm, child-care was just too expensive, I didn't have the income"* (255-264). *"I desperately, desperately wanted to get out and, and do something. I felt as if I was stagnating, that I was just marking time"* (676-682). Jane too has now remarried.

Joanne's experience is similar; she began training to be an accountant. During her training she married and then moved to accommodate her husband's job. When she became pregnant she gave up work on the basis that *"if I'm having this baby then I should really look after the baby. And also, I, I don't know, but maybe my husband being 8 years older than me, he was, well very conservative in his ways, if you like. It didn't really present itself as a realistic option for both"* (42-50).

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Joanne did not complete her training and on reflection acknowledges that she sacrificed her career as a consequence of the path she took at that time. Joanne implies that these cannot be termed 'decisions'; she feels that the path she took was *"almost a foregone conclusion. I think, for all, you know, academically I, I was more, sort of, highly qualified, which doesn't mean much but ... Because he was so, well he was, you know, 8 years older, so therefore that much more progressed in his career-path and could earn much better money than I could at that time. It was just assumed, even by both of us I think, subconsciously, that the wife goes wherever the husband did and picks up what she can where they are then. Erm, there was never equal thought given to both career-paths"* (437-444). Eventually, Joanne too divorced.

Elizabeth also travelled this journey, although her route was more convoluted and tortuous. She started work in a cinema and met someone, *"But erm, we had problems like. And I was emotionally immature, I suppose, really"* (122-125). *"And er, I did want to marry him and he didn't (laughs quietly) want to marry me (sighs). Oh dear me. It all went wrong and I've never been the same since. Well, we could have had a child actually and er, he didn't want to have the child so I got rid of the child, never forgave him. We never talked about that. So I caused a lot of bitterness. Erm, and, it was only, it wasn't even a year, about 6 months after we finally called it a day (...) I met me husband. Eh, and what a laugh, you know. We only knew each other for 6 months and we wor married and I was pregnant, and I was very happy, you know, especially when me son was born cause to me, it made up for all of the ... Erm, and being faced with that decision to take a life away, it left me, I thought when it went away it would all be forgotten about. Unfortunately I never, ever forgot it"* (374-392). Despite being happily married and despite being happy with her son, the time came when Elizabeth started to question her life. She thought *"What am I gonna do?" He worked all the time and suddenly I was faced with 'What am I gonna do?' And there was somebody living downstairs below us and he told us about the Open University"* (394-402).

Like Susan, Jane and Joanne, Elizabeth then found herself moving with her husband, a situation that eventually led to divorce and the difficulties of managing on her own. However, as she spoke to me, Elizabeth came to a particular realisation, *"Being on*

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*me own. Really having to face up to the fact that, you know, in this life, you know, you, you can only depend on yourself (laughs quietly), really. I mean, you can depend on men to an extent but they inevitably let you down"* (791-799).

Susan, Jane, Joanne and Elizabeth provide graphic examples of how the romance, marriage and motherhood discourses suck women in and imperiously direct their life trajectory. They also amply illustrate that romantic love is not always enough to sustain a marriage. And yet, despite knowing this, *'We have all imbibed the potion and have all been drunk on it'* (Grymes:1996:13), possibly more than once, as the mature women's marriage, divorce and remarriage suggests.

Feminine discourse positions women as dependent on men for the fulfilment of their emotional, sexual and material needs, which obviously places men in a position of power. Romantic love hoodwinks women into the belief that two people are attracted to, and choose each other, as equals, *'with different though equally valuable qualities and experiences to offer one another'* (Grymes:1996:15) whereas in reality it is men who are dominant, men who are the judges in these matters and women who are subservient. Women rarely initiate relationships or propose marriage; to do so would be considered unfeminine. That men are dominant is borne out by episodes such as Elizabeth wanting to marry and her boyfriend not, by her having an abortion because her boyfriend didn't want a child; by Susan, Jane, Joanne and Elizabeth putting their own desires, needs and aspirations aside as they moved geographical location to accommodate their husbands' jobs.

According to Marwick (1998), the late 1960s was a time *'of aspiration after self-fulfilment'* (p381), but how can women find self-fulfilment when romance, marriage and motherhood operate to ensure their subordination. As Jane remarked, when a women gets married everything goes up the creek. Grymes (1996) thinks women are in an impossible position, one in which *'all self-sacrifice is good and self-interest is selfish, egocentric, narcissistic ... There is no space here for growth and self-discovery'* (p64). The problem is, women are not only supposed to behave in an appropriate manner, they are also supposed to *'feel the appropriate feelings'* (Ginsberg:1976:78) and it is not appropriate for women – and mothers in particular –

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to feel stagnation, boredom and frustration, after all marriage and motherhood are supposed to be the epitome of women's lives.

The criminal negligence of romantic discourse is that it does not prepare young women *'for the relentless boredom of scrubbing floors and ironing shirts'* (Gavron:1966:132), to say nothing of the *'sick on their shoulders'* (Cooper:1974:22) and the sleepless nights of motherhood.

The outcome for many of the mature women was divorce. I was going to say the inevitable outcome, but of course this has not always been the case. Indeed, until the legislative changes of the 1970s (Adam:1975), divorce was unlikely to have been an option for the majority of women. Thus, in its way, changes in divorce legislation have come to represent a form of resistance to the traditional marriage model.

In their accounts of divorce a number of the mature women highlight an issue of particular significance for women's psychological development. Elizabeth gave a hint of it when she said *'you can only rely on yourself'*. This issue relates to how women are forced to *'grow up'* after divorce.

When Bridget left school she got a job in a factory and married a bricklayer. Her husband *"wasn't making much money with the weather and that and I was making about £300 a week then (...) you know, and I divn't think he liked it, think he was a bit jealous. And, er, and he says 'Well, what you gonna do is pay the bills' and, yer kna, er, like the lectric. Well, he paid the rent and that's all he paid. I never got a wage off him. He, erm, he just says 'Well, what's yours is yours', yer kna, didn't like, but, never mind"* (138-145). Bridget's husband didn't do any domestic work and didn't socialise with her, in the end they were divorced. Bridget she says that after the divorce she had to grow up a great deal to cope on her own.

This concept of *'growing up'* is a theme that Kate raised too. After she married, *"that was it. I didn't, I didn't go to work once I was married"* (374-375). Her husband expected her to stay at home, *"we were both brought up in that sort of environment so, you just drift along with the tide. You just ... you know, you don't even think about it"* (396-398). She then had three children in quick succession and



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enjoyed being at home with them, but if she could *"turn the clock back, I wouldn't do it, if you can understand that"* (422-426). This remark was a reflection on the fact that her marriage collapsed, an event she considers to be a transitional point in her life. *"Well, I had to change because I was the one who had to bring the children up. I had to protect them. I had to look after them. They looked to me for everything. So I had to become a stronger person, which I did"* (455-457).

Kate married a second time and *"It was completely different. But, like I say, I had made the conscious effort of not going back, I was going forward"* (525-533). In other words, Kate was making her own decisions, was taking control of her life.

Femininity positions women as passive, submissive and dependent. Dowling (1981) describes this dependency as the *'need to lean on someone – the need, going back to infancy, to be nurtured and cared for and kept from harm's way'* (p13). And yet it seems that the mature women could not escape harm, even though they conformed to the requirements of socially prescribed marriage. The consequences of positioning oneself as dependent are that at a major transition in life such as divorce, a woman is forced to examine her 'self' and her situation, and as she *'looks within [she] knows that she was never trained to feel comfortable with the idea of taking care of herself, standing up for herself, asserting herself'* (Dowling:1981:13).

During their major transitions Elizabeth, Bridget and Kate came to realise that they had been taught to suppress their needs and desires from an early age and that rejection of this discourse does not make them 'hysterical' (Rowbotham:1973), rather their anger helps them to develop as adult human beings.

The possibility of rejecting traditional marriage can be attributed to the social changes taking place in the 1960s and 70s. At this time alternative lifestyle constructions were becoming visible, with models of women who engaged in paid employment, had economic independence, were divorcing, were heads of households, were marrying later and opting to remain single or childless. Even though these changes have been slow to permeate society, they nevertheless constitute massive changes in a short period of time, changes that suggest women can take action to determine their own life trajectories. Baker Miller (1976) believes

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that if women don't take action they will '*continue to lead circumscribed lives controlled by others*' (p123).

And indeed, not all the mature women conform to the submissive stereotype; Liz was always assertive. She aspired to become a pharmacist and did not see herself as a wife and mother. Even setbacks in her chosen career path did not daunt her; she simply changed her career goal from pharmacist to maths teacher. And difficulties in obtaining a teaching post merely delayed, rather than destroyed her ambitions. But even Liz didn't escape the romance discourse. Nevertheless, although she married and divorced, she has stuck to her determination not to have children and is quite happy with her life as it is.

Even though there are exceptions, the stereotypical female role remains dominant and because traditional feminine discourses are so pervasive, it is difficult for women to articulate negative emotions regarding their role. Who will a woman tell? Other women, themselves caught up in the discourse? Men, caught up in their own discourse with no points of reference to understand what she is saying? Friedan (1963) called this '*The Problem That Has No Name*' (p13) and although initially an American thesis, it has come to represent a much wider audience, an audience of women who feel guilty if they only silently ask themselves: '*Is this all?*' (Friedan:1963:13). Most of the mature women here must have asked this question at some point in their lives as most of them are divorced.

So far I have concentrated on the mature women's experience of marriage and motherhood. However, there is an additional path that most of the mature women have travelled at some stage, and that is employment.

Emma started work in an insurance company, which she enjoyed until her boss began to harass her. "*I was with a dirty-minded boss. And, there was erm, one point, he asked me if I'd wear cami-knickers. And erm, I asked my dad, when I got home. Didn't ask my mam, asked my dad. And he said, 'Well, who's asked you that?' And I said 'It, well, well it was my boss'. And erm, I mean, you know, he went berserk, me dad. So, I, 'Oh don't, don't come in and say anything'. Cause I was worried that I would loose me job. And er, but my dad used to come and meet me from work every*

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*day after that (...) I mean, in this day and age he'd be done for sexual harassment. Of course there was no such thing then. And it really got me worried"* (314-327).

Caroline and Sarah understand Emma's predicament. Caroline said, *"when I think back, some of the things he used to say to me, I think that would come under erm, sexual harassment. Sort of things like erm, erm, what, what size, what size are you, what are your measurements (...) I, at the time, and the age he was, I think I, I felt as if I handled it alright. But, when you think back now and you hear various things that have gone on with other people, you know, I came into that category. I, I didn't really see it as that at the time"* (454-480).

Sarah got a job as an office junior, *"It was boring, but what the hell, there was the pay packet at the end of the week, and that's what you were there for"* (429-437). *"Some of the bosses gave you the creeps. You know, I'm talking about the late 60s and skirts were really short (...) Well, one boss, he was always telling girls to reach for things on high shelves, or low shelves where they had to bend down for them, you know (...) But they were the bosses so you couldn't say 'No' could you? (...) Women wouldn't stand for it now"* (450-459). *"But that's another thing. You don't have the confidence to say anything when you're 16 (...) They hold the power don't they? It's difficult to do anything about it when they can sack you, you know what I mean?"* (461-469).

As well as sexual harassment, it's also difficult to resist sexual discrimination when you know the boss can sack you, particularly when your aspiration is to always have a job and earn money, as it was in Tracy's case. Tracy worked in an engineering company where her boss told her that she *"wasn't getting a pay rise because the lad in the office (...) would have to erm, support a family in time. So he was getting a pay rise. He actually said that to me when I went for me pay rise one year. But it was, that was acceptable, them days. You wouldn't have thought 'I'm going to the flipping equality council to say that this isn't equal opps' or anything. You just thought 'Oh, why, that's typical of these lot. I'm not getting a pay rise'"* (893-916).

Emma, Caroline, Sarah and Tracy's experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination at work are complex issues whose foundations reside in male power

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and control. Adler *et al* (1995) describe organisations as male cultures, places of male power. Against this background, Tracy did not qualify for a pay rise because she was not destined to be a breadwinner, whereas her male counterpart was. These employment practices thus intersect with the traditional marriage model in which men are breadwinners and women are homemakers, marginalizing women and devaluing what they do. But it isn't only what women 'do' that it is devalued. In the case of sexual harassment it is also who women 'are' that is both objectified and devalued. Adler *et al* (1995) maintain that *'no matter how well they manage their sexuality and gender, women's sexuality is always available as a means of control'* (p17).

Emma, Caroline and Sarah illustrate how male power is exercised as a means of sexual control in the workplace when they make the point that youth, inexperience and position in the organisation made it difficult for them to resist – and there was no legislative protection for the mature women at that time. Given the male culture of organisations, women's submissive socialization, the mature women's youth, inexperience and lack of voice, one can understand why they were frightened, why they couldn't resist. Nevertheless, whilst they may have found vocal resistance difficult, it can be argued that Emma and Caroline did actively resist by finding different employment, even though an alternative interpretation is that they were reactive rather than proactive, having been positioned as sex objects, where, as I mentioned in Chapter One, to be an object is to be deprived of agency and *'subjected to the agentic acts of others'* (Davies:1992:63).

At the end of Chapter Six I expressed a feeling of sadness concerning the mature women's sense of fatalism regarding their futures. Having talked about what they actually did after they left school – was their sense of fatalism justified, do I still have a feeling of sadness? Yes and no. Yes, because many of the mature women sacrificed any career prospects they had to accommodate the socially expected wife and mother role, only to have that role shattered through divorce. Then they were confined to low-paid, low-status jobs because as single parents they could not engage in full-time employment without support structures such as childcare, which few could afford. Yes, because some of them were not safe in their workplaces, being subject to sexual harassment and discrimination. On the other hand, no, I don't

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feel sad because, despite the problems, some of the mature women resisted the discourses through divorce and as a consequence developed as adult human beings. As such they serve as role models for the next generation of young women, whether they are considered to be hysterical troublemakers or not.

Before saying farewell to the mature women, I asked them to project forward and talk about what life will be like for the girls of today, to consider if things are different for girls today.

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## **Chapter Eight**

### **Reflections and Projections**

***I would shed my surrounding, like a butterfly  
sheds a chrysalis, and I would fly towards a future  
which was not lumbered with other people's relics.***

(Brookner: Look At Me)

Susan, Bridget, Jane, Joanne, Kate, Elizabeth, Emma, Caroline, Liz, Sarah, Janet and Tracy, women – like myself – born in the traditional social order of the 1950s, reflected on what they think life will be like for today's girls as they, in their turn, prepare to take their places in the adult world. Will things be different for them?

As I indicated in the Introduction, when I started this study my view was that life hasn't changed very much for girls today when compared with my own generation, and Susan feels much the same. When she asks her young pupils what they want to be when they grow up, they say “‘*An air hostess*’. I say ‘*No, you want to be the pilot (...)* you know, why not have the better job, not just, it's not just for men’. But girls tend to, don't they? They're still writing ‘*I want to be a nurse or a teacher*’, and the boys always wanted to drive fast cars and, you know, be pilots. And the girls, girls always want to be little mums, don't they” (641-652).

Kate shook her head in disagreement, “*I can't see young ones of today ... getting married, staying at home and ... bringing up the family ... erm, without a fight* (322-327). *Well, you'll always meet barriers, always. That won't ever change but you can jump over those barriers now*” (770-771). In Kate's view roles have changed significantly, to women's advantage, “*women's change was upwards, men's change was downwards because they're doing the things that were frowned upon. I think that's the way it's gone. Women have gone up and men have gone down*” (1038-1041).

Kate's is an interesting summation, one that highlights the persistence of sex-role ideology and the male-as-norm. In saying that men's role has moved down because

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they are engaging in domestic tasks serves to illustrate how domestic, i.e., female tasks have been devalued. In this sense *'progress for women ... is viewed ... as occurring when women are able to incorporate more and more 'masculine' tasks and roles. There is much less impetus for men to incorporate 'feminine' tasks'* (Wetherell:1986:90).

Changing role constructions is a theme that Joanne and Sarah talked about too. Joanne remarked on her perceptions of changes in the male role, *"there's been, you know, 'renaissance man' and all this type of thing where men do help out with the baby. I mean, even when you see, like, these 16/17 year old dads out with the baby in the buggy. At one time that would have been, Oh my goodness! Now you see, quite common isn't it?"* (613-631).

Sarah is aware of possible ambiguities inherent in this changed construction, with a sceptical edge to her comments she highlights some of the phrases and images of fatherhood currently in vogue, *"It's become quite common for men to do the shopping and look after the children now, isn't it? (...) now it's the 'koowl' [stressing the 'w'] thing for men to do isn't it? You know, all those adverts with hunky men stripped to their underpants cradling a little baby in their arms. This 'new man', do you know any new men?"* (629-638).

Faced with her question – which wasn't rhetorical – I realised that I know very few men who take full responsibility for homes and children in the way that women have traditionally done.

Even supposing there is some truth in the view that roles are changing, Jane thinks that modern life is *"a balancing act. And I would say that a lot of the pressure comes on the women to, to actually do the balancing"* (1123-1137). Joanne agrees and sees the critical point being *"when people decide to have a family. It will, no matter how equal they are, it will always be the woman who's expected to take the day off when the child is ill"* (505-508). Is this a case of fathers performing 'public' helping tasks and acquiring the kudos that seems to be attached to such acts, while women continue to carry the private, unsung responsibility, that is believed to be naturally theirs anyway?

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Role change is inextricably linked to family change and although Susan sees today's girls following trajectories similar to those of her generation, she also thinks that they have more choices. She mentions that girls can choose "*whether to have a family and when to have a family. Er, even if to have a male partner or not, you know. I mean, you've got the choice of single women ... having children if they want to*" (1651-1660).

However, not everyone applauds these choices. Bridget's worries concerning teenage pregnancy are steeped in traditional female, marriage and motherhood discourses. "*I don't think it's right, kids having bairns because (...) you know, they're, they're still young, the mother and father, you know*" (189-196). Neither does she approve of young people not being married when they have children, they're "*just living together aren't they? And they have children. And I think that's wrong on their children. Having children before they're married because, yer kna, why the poor kids when they start school, someone's going to turn round and say 'You're a [head nod to indicate unspoken word], you know. And it's not fair. I was called that, when I was at school. And er, I kna what's like*" (720-726).

Caroline picks up Bridget's comments about single mothers and adds economic threads to the case. She wonders "*how, if they didn't have a male in the house to be a breadwinner, then, how do they survive?*" (755-758). Musing on the matter she answers her own question and is optimistic about the help she perceives to be available to single mothers. "*There's more availability of childcare, erm, opportunities, social services being there to, to help out. Erm, there's more opportunities for them to go out to work. Equal opportunities, some employers now have crèches. There's more avenues for them to have a career*" (760-764).

Another important change theme the women mentioned is education. Bridget feels very strongly about the educational pressures she thinks children face today, "*I mean, look at the bairns at 7 year old now, what they've gorra do. I think it's all wrong. Erm, I know kids are more advanced now, what we were, but er, I think at 7 year old (...) I don't know, just thought it's a bit hard on them*" (210-227).



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Sarah concedes that there may be increased pressures, but she wistfully comments on the increased educational opportunities for girls today compared with her own experience. *"They all get qualifications when they leave school, well nearly all of them, and they are more or less expected to go to university now, aren't they. I wish I'd been able to do that. And they can be whatever they want to be"* (594-599). But there is a sting in the tail. Sarah sees *"such a bleak future for young people now that haven't got a decent education"* (345-346).

I think this pressure started in the late 1970s and is linked to economic recession and unemployment. Although I can't speak from experience of having a daughter, I looked for the best school for my son, dismissing the local comprehensive because I did not perceive it as providing a high enough standard of education to equip a young person for an ever-diminishing world of work, and I do believe that I would have done the same thing for a daughter. Now I see this pressure extending to my grandsons, being a topic of conversation and planning even before they start school. And there is an expectation that most young people will go to university, a situation I could never have contemplated for myself.

Sarah reflected that things were not this straightforward. *"Even if you get qualifications at school not everybody can afford to go to university now that they have to pay fees. I read somewhere that women don't like to get loans, so they don't go to university. That's not fair is it? And if they don't get the qualifications, if they don't go to university, then they probably won't get a high career either. So it's still easier for men than for women, isn't it?"* (601-607).

Joanne agrees with Sarah, she too is pessimistic about girls' options if they *"leave school with less qualifications, I mean this might sound totally prejudice, still, still [these girls] just think in the smaller picture, probably, you know, house and a family, erm, and then some kind of part-time work to have enough money to spend to do what they want"* (775-789).

Bridget has already voiced her traditional views concerning family and education, so it is no surprise that she also has traditional views concerning employment. She feels that male unemployment is a cause of many marital problems. *"I thought it was a*

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*man's place to work. And now that the men canna get jobs and the, and the wages (...) what they do get, I think it's a disgrace, for a man. An er, if a man gorra, like a decent wage (...) Let the woman stop in, or if they want to go out to work, yes. That's up to them, you know. But there is a lot **has** to, you know (594-604). I think it's **wrong**, you know (...) a lad wants to be a doctor, fair enough, he's exams and things like that to go through, you know, if he **wants** to. But like, if a man wants to just earn a decent wage by going to 've a factory or, well, mines, there's no mines now" (653-661) ... "they get more frustrated now cause they, they can't earn enough to keep their families and this is why there's a lot of divorce, you know (620-622). The women are going out and the men are stopping at home like a, say a house, er, husband or whatever they call them. You know, doing a woman's work in the house, looking after the kids. I think, like I say, it's degrading for a man to do that, you know, when he canna get a decent job, for his family, and he's a true er, working fella, yer kna. And it's, it's just pulled him right down" (666-681). So like Kate, Bridget sees men's involvement in domestic tasks as being a retrograde step.*

Kate picked up Bridget's unemployment thread and its effects on the family and in her comments she suggests that young people can make changes as a result of exposure to different constructions. In Kate's view, *"there are kids of today who've grown up in a household where neither the mother nor the father works (...) and that's been the norm to them. And I think 'Well, are they going to end up in that situation'. And hopefully not because, you know, they can see beyond that. They can see that they don't have to be in that situation. They can work towards leaving that and going beyond it. And I'm sure a lot of them do. But there are also a big percentage who just drift into that situation cause that's what they've known" (1045-1054).*

Jane is more optimistic about women's employment opportunities than Bridget. Nevertheless, although she thinks there are more employment opportunities for girls today, she also believes that women still have to contend with occupational sex segregation. She gave examples of medicine and engineering, *"if they want to go off and do something like medicine, I still think that that's a hard door for them to push open. Erm, if they want to do something like engineering they're, well, to be honest, I mean, with engineering they're welcomed at most universities with open arms,*

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*because, I mean engineering, it's such a dead difficult, to fill. But it's when they get out into the workplace. That, that prejudice is still there"* (1319-1325).

Even in traditional female occupations, Jane believes that a major barrier to women's employment will continue to be childcare, in terms of availability and cost. I think there is a related factor here and that is the structure of employment terms and conditions. Although some employers operate flexible working patterns, many others operate rigid start and finish times which are problematic for many mothers, particularly those who don't have or can't afford adequate childcare.

In Jane's view the difficulty of obtaining childcare is likely to be exacerbated for today's girls by the fact that the help traditionally provided by grandparents is becoming scarce because *"grandma herself is at work. So childcare has to be paid for and, and it's, it's expensive* (1083-1098). The expectation that it will be grandma who takes on these responsibilities again demonstrates the persistence of the belief that childcare is women's responsibility.

On this subject, Joanne questions the benefits of ample childcare provision. She remarks that if there was ample affordable childcare it would mean that new mothers need not *"take that career break, or you don't have to break mid-way totally. But then, do you miss out on a lot? You know, your kids only have that few years at home growing up"* (520-524). On the other hand, Sarah suggests that the consequences of a woman taking a career break are that *"the men are getting promoted over her while she's off, aren't they? And you can't catch up with them on part-time work, can you? So your chance has gone* (619-621).

The mature women have thus highlighted a number of constants and changes they think are likely to affect today's girls. For example, today's girls will continue to be wives and mothers, but they may not conform to traditional wife/mother constructions willingly. Unemployment may be something today's girls will have to contend with, for themselves and their partners, but they are still likely to carry the main domestic and childcare workloads, whether they are employed or not. In their reflections it seems that the mature women are suggesting that the traditional feminine, family, wife/mother and employment roles have become but one of many

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constructions. They suggest that today's girls can choose not to marry, can choose to have children without a resident male, can choose to remain childless, can stay home, work, or combine all these roles.

The point is that the mature women *think* that girls today have choices that they didn't have, thus they think that things are different for girls today and perhaps through their expression of these thoughts they are acting as change agents for the next generation of women and helping to construct these changes through their discursive interactions.

Indeed, Sarah and Janet explicitly stated that they see their generation as being a generation of change agents. Sarah looked thoughtful and remarked, *"my life as a mother has been completely different to that of my mum. And the girls today see how women of my generation did it and that's influenced them, so maybe we can change things. It's complicated"* (752-754). Janet agreed, *"the generation that we are now, we've ended up being the piggies in the middle, really. Cause the, the young women now have got this conditioning that this is what's gonna happen. They're gonna be successful, they're gonna have a career. They're gonna have a relationship (...) We're kinda the pioneers for this"* (205-218).

These reflections on what life might be like for girls in a post-traditional social order brings me to the close of the mature women's accounts. In Chapters 9 - 11 the teenage women make their appearance and we talk about what their experience actually is. I wonder if they, in their turn, will consider themselves to be change agents for the generations that will follow?

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## **Chapter Nine**

### **Born Circa 1980**

***It is necessary, indeed unavoidable, that he should intersect the lives of his dramatis personae at a given hour; all that remains is to decide which hour it will be, and in what situation they shall be discovered. There is no more reason why they should not first be observed lying in a bassinette – having just been deposited for the first time in it ...***  
(Sackville-West: The Edwardians)

Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary, the teenage women who worked with me, were first discovered lying in their bassinets between 1984-85, in working-class families in the North East of England. This chapter presents aspects of the sociohistorical context of that time and the teenage women talk about their early childhood lives in a post-traditional social order (see Chapter Two). We talk about male and female roles, marriage, children, domestic work, having a voice and perceptions of change.

As I thought about the 1980s, I was surprised to find that this seemed to be a lost decade for me. Reflecting on this initial reaction I came to the conclusion that it wasn't so much lost as suppressed in my consciousness, probably because of my negative reactions to Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative government. The force of this realisation once again reiterated the need to look at the issues critically rather than emotionally, regardless of how difficult it is to divorce oneself from one's personal context. Whether I have been completely successful in this endeavour I am not sure, all that I can say is that I have consciously tried to be.

In thus bringing my memories of the 1980s back into consciousness, what I do remember vividly is a period of high inflation, high interest rates, privatisation, redundancy – which affected me personally – industrial strikes and civil unrest. I remember thinking that with a female Prime Minister the position of women in general was bound to improve. However, rather than being a women's champion,

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Margaret Thatcher behaved towards women in much the same way as many of her male predecessors had done, that is, she advocated the traditional family and the positioning of women as dependent wives and mothers, and this from an iron lady who was stubbornly not for turning. In emphasising women's domestic role she *'did not invite them to become, like her, powerful'* (Campbell:1987:234), which seemed to contradict *'her insistent emphasis on individual opportunity'* (Webster:1990:51). Nevertheless, by displaying determination, dominance, independence, action, power, authority, leadership etc., that is traditional male behaviours, she was also constructed as a role model of female achievement.

When the Conservative party came to power in 1979, Britain was in the midst of a severe global recession, economic factors that impinged directly on people's lives – for better or worse. The government increased VAT and interest rates and cut public expenditure; inflation rose and employment fell. Childs (1986) remarks that *'1980 saw the biggest drop in industrial activity since the 1930s'* (p303) and by the mid-1980s Robinson (1987) found that *'employment in the Northern Region fell by ... 18% ... more severe than any other region in Britain'* (p7). Privatisation and reduced public expenditure led to massive job losses, with male jobs in industry and manufacturing being particularly badly affected. Even where men did manage to remain in employment, in the financial climate of the 1980s most men's wages were insufficient to support the ideological dependent wife and children much advocated by the Conservative party. The North East, as Robinson (1987) notes, had the *'highest proportion of households on very low incomes (less than £75 a week in 1984) of any region in mainland Britain and the highest level of dependence on social security benefits'* (pp7-8). In a 'State of the Region' report for 2003 (IR25) the situation does not appear to have improved greatly. Men's and women's earnings are reported to be 14% less than the UK average and 56% of the North East's population are living in the most deprived 20% of wards in England.

The North East of England is the region in which the teenage women were born, an area that has traditionally relied on industries such as heavy engineering, mining and shipbuilding; in the 1980s the North East was *'particularly hard-hit by recession and jobs had been lost, on a large scale, in virtually all parts of the economy'*

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(Robinson:1988:46), with the traditional industries being the most subject to closures and redundancies.

This is not to suggest that new jobs were not being created, they were. Whilst traditional, male-oriented industries were disappearing, service and technology sectors were booming. However, the bulk of these jobs were low-paid, low-status and part-time – jobs more likely to be taken up by women than men. In areas of high male unemployment, many wives became the sole earner and even where both partners were working, talk of dual-earner families can be misleading because often a wife's income was a necessity rather than a luxury. In the North East, many service jobs were created and the chemical, food, furniture and clothing industries did reasonably well. In addition '*a few new large scale manufacturing developments [came] to Tyneside – Findus, Komatsu and Dunlop Armaline*' (Robinson:1988:46).

One of the major consequences of the recession was the effect it had on the youth employment market, which is generally taken to be the male youth market, nevertheless, this downturn affected females as well. Even in traditional discourses, young women are expected to be employees for a short time after they leave school and before they marry, therefore I use the term 'youth' to include females as well as males. At this time employers were no longer recruiting new workers – the majority of whom had traditionally come from the youth sector, consequently the youth labour market virtually disappeared. In his research, Robinson (1987) found that by '*October 1986, 46% of unemployed [benefit] claimants had been out of work for more than a year and 29% for over two years. There are many young people who have never had a job other than a short-term place on an MSC scheme*' (p8). Initially the government blamed young people themselves for their predicament, condemning them for not having the skills and qualifications needed by employers.

In the individualist ideology of the New Right, each person was responsible for their own circumstances, that is, they only had themselves to blame, a viewpoint made infamous by '*Norman Tebbit's call for the unemployed to 'get on their bikes*'' (Ashton:1989:20) and find work, which assumes they could afford a bike in the first place! As part of this self-reliant ideology, state benefits were cut as a means of 'encouraging' people into employment. However, these accusations were extremely

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thin as youth unemployment continued to soar and *'young people with good educational qualifications failed to secure work'* (Ashton:1989:19).

By the early 1990s the situation had, if anything, worsened. Marwick (1996) contends that *'1990 and 1991 were years of deepest recession, in which GDP declined and official unemployment figures went up over 3 million'* (p401), consequently, the polite response to Mr Tebbit was 'what work?'

This emphasis on employment is important because in western society being employed confers many personal benefits such as purchasing power, social status, adult development and an outlet for social activities, whereas being unemployed is a major psychological trauma leading to multiple deprivation, something I can certainly identify with. When I was made redundant in 1981 I definitely felt traumatised; I had a child to support and a home to run, to say nothing of my feelings of diminished self-worth. What are the consequences, then, for a nation where millions are unemployed and disaffected? In Clarke's (1982) view, the recession of the 1980s has contributed to an employment discourse wherein universal employment and employment for life are no longer realistic expectations, a discourse that may well impact on women's aspirational/expectational development.

Unemployment can result in adults getting caught up in an employment trap, where they drift in and out of part-time, low-paid jobs, and where children suffer the effects of poverty. Ashton (1989) estimates that in April 1988 there were *'in the region of 900,000 children under 19 ... growing up in families of the long-term unemployed'* (p25). The danger is that as unemployment becomes long-term, it becomes the culture of the family. In these families young people have never known what it is to work, all they have known is poverty, deprivation and social exclusion, factors it is feared they may perpetuate in their own families.

At this time, the government changed many aspects of the welfare system – such as unemployment and housing benefits – in its 1986 Social Security Act. The changes introduced by this Act were intended to reduce welfare dependency and give *'greater responsibility and greater independence to the individual'* (Marwick:1996:353). One of the changes that directly affected young people was



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that 16-18 year olds lost their entitlement to benefit altogether, thereby encouraging them into work, education or training schemes. Gilmour (1992) suggests that these changes were linked to Conservative notions of the ' *'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor*' (p153), a point I made in Chapter Three when discussing the Victorian origins of the concept of the deserving and undeserving poor and its relation to the working class. The undeserving poor in Thatcherite Britain were an underclass of work-shy benefit scroungers, who were proving to be extremely expensive for the nation and could no longer be tolerated. What this argument ignores is the fact that it was '*the government's economic policy and the resulting mass unemployment which were largely responsible for the increase in dependency in the first place*' (Gilmour:1992: 154).

Add to the unemployed, people who were '*talked into buying their homes or taking out private pensions, being unable to keep up payments on the former, and finding the latter falling far short of what had been promised; beggars in the streets; the homeless in cardboard boxes*' (Marwick:1996:395-6), then the social scene has all the hallmarks of a Dickensian novel rather than an advanced industrial nation in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Taking all these things together, Childs (1986) suggests that factors such as economic hardship, unemployment and unequally distributed wealth must have been factors that contributed to the civil unrest that rocked Britain in the 1980s. There were industrial strikes by steelworkers (1980), miners (1984-5) and seamen (1987), there was social strife in Handsworth, Brixton and Toxteth (Kettle & Hodges:1982), and there was political strife embodied in the Greenham Common peace campaign. Perhaps these are some of the consequences for the nation of mass unemployment and disaffection. Social unrest and riots '*do not just 'erupt*' (Kettle & Hodges:1982:11), there have to be reasons. However, the government thought that trying to identify reasons equated with looking for excuses for what were criminal acts. In other words, right-wing political discourse '*produced*' acts of criminality that had to be crushed with all expediency, a discourse which, in the process, denied the existence of urban deprivation, poverty and unemployment.

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Of course, this is only part of the story – undoubtedly there were people who prospered in the 1980s, such as those who were already comfortably off and those who clung on to full-time employment (Marwick:1996). One aspect of increased prosperity can be seen in increased home ownership. Hamnett (1989) notes that between '1980 and 1987, one million council houses had been sold in Britain – almost 15 per cent of the stock' (p204) under the 'right to buy' provisions of the 1980 Housing Act. Gilmour (1992) concurs, by '*the time Mrs Thatcher left office almost a million and a half families had taken advantage of the legislation, and the proportion of owner-occupied dwellings had increased from 55 per cent in 1979 to more than two-thirds in 1990*' (p175). Childs (1986) sees the selling of council houses below the market price as a means of '*transferring wealth from the relatively better off to the less well off (though not to the poorest)*' (pp296-7) who wouldn't have been able to secure a mortgage. On Tyneside private house-building increased sharply in the 1980s, '*reaching a peak in 1983 when 1,862 private sector dwellings were completed, the highest post-war number [and by] March 1986 there had been 16,000 'Right-to-Buy' sales in Tyneside (DoE Local Housing Statistics), amounting to 10.7% of the council stock in 1981*' (Cameron & Crompton:1988:140-41).

A second factor that contributed to increased prosperity was that people from all walks of life bought shares in the denationalised utilities and other privatised companies. '*A survey carried out for the Treasury and the Stock Exchange in 1987 found that nearly 20 per cent of the adult population owned shares*' (Pond:1989:72), and these were people from all socio-economic groups, including pensioners and manual workers.

This, then, was the classless enterprise culture where business would flourish, the pound would be held steady and '*individual initiative and freedom would replace dependency*' (Marwick:1996:310-11), particularly dependency on the welfare state. In this enterprise culture acquisitiveness (or greed depending on your point of view) was fashionable. 'Yuppies' bought and sold commodities of all kinds and earned vast commissions. Conspicuous consumerism and flashy ostentation were part of the yuppie scene, the icons of prosperity being '*the Porsche or Escort Gti, the Rolex watch and the mobile phone*' (Bates & Riseborough:1993:4). However, this lifestyle

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was the preserve of the few, it was also ephemeral, as the stock market crash of 1987 was to demonstrate.

Walkerdine *et al* (2001) link these right wing policies with class affiliations, they suggest that the Conservative policy on selling council houses was one strategy for paving the way for '*the working class to reinvent itself and masquerade as middle class, a masquerade that in fact has never worked entirely*' (p22). That the reinvention didn't work entirely seems to be reinforced by a MORI Social Values Research (IR23) report published in 2002 which claims that '*two-thirds of the adult public now claim to feel "working class and proud of it"*'. Post-traditional society is said to be classless and people are individuals; where individualism is a '*way to move beyond a stultifying traditionalism*' (Walkerdine *et al*:2001:24), such as working-class trade union solidarity for example. Margaret Thatcher dismissed class as a communist idea and John Major expressed the desire for Britain to be '*a genuinely classless society so people can rise to whatever level from whatever level they started*' (IR24), but from this MORI research it would seem that many people don't accept the concept of a classless society.

Thus, in the decade in which the teenage women were born, Britain was on the cusp of a new social order, though perhaps this wasn't widely apparent at the time. The country had a woman at the helm, a woman who was '*a prime minister, a warrior, and a housewife*' (Campbell:1987:233). When I spoke to the teenage women, I started by asking them to reflect on what they thought life was like for their mothers and grandmothers. These descriptions act as a bridge connecting the teenage and mature women's experiences and provide a context against which to situate the teenage women's own early childhood learning experiences.

Samantha thinks her mum and grandmother had good lives. When I asked what she meant by 'good', she laughed at first and said, "*I don't know*". But then she thought about it and said, "*Erm ... like, being at school, like they could have done some work, an then they've had children and then went back to work, and then got married* (laughs). *That's what I think. Well, I might be wrong, but, I'm just guessing it*" (385-393).

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Her mother had a job when she left school, but she *"hasn't had one since she's had kids"* (420-422) and seems to be happy about it. *"Erm, well she's glad she's seen wer all grown up, there's not just two of us, there's more. But erm, she's just happy to see, like, I've grown up and see how me little brother's grown up"* (430-432).

An emphasis on domestic work figures strongly in many of the teenage women's accounts. Christina recalls her mother's stories *"like, going in the back yard (slight laugh) and cleaning the washing"* (290-292), and Sarah thinks that women had to be *"in the kitchen all the time, looking after the kids. Do all the shoppin. Erm, an the men have to be at work, earn the money"* (182-183). Melanie nodded, *"Yeh. Cause of the, the women were the housewives. [They] didn't have much of a say, didn't voice an opinion. Erm, would be the nest-maker. Making sure the man was all right an fully taken care of"* (332-344).

Danielle said that when her mother was young, women *"just used to leave school and gerra job. Earn money and that (...) [her grandmother left school] very young. She had to gerra job at the hospital in the kitchens. She had to, that's where she ... nearly all ov her life"* (127-135).

I asked the teenage women how much housework they have to do; in their responses they talk about 'helping mother out'.

Melanie will *"cook and clean an, when it's necessary. But I, I don't particularly like it. Erm, me brother helps out. I mean, if he brings his toys out he'll put them back an things like that, but, she usually does it herself. I mean, I do, do the dishes and things like that for her, but, she prefers to do it herself because it keeps her busy an, things like that"* (255-260). As far as her father is concerned, *"Erm, probably moves his shoes, occasionally (laughter) Oh, I must, to be fair, I mean, he does do like, the decorating an everything, but, it takes him half a year to turn around (laughter)"* (264-267). Christina, Mary, Marie and Sarah agreed, their mothers do the bulk of the domestic work, although they help out sometimes.

Louise's perception of who does what is a source of conflict. Although she helps with the domestic tasks, her mother complains that she doesn't do enough. *"Like me*

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*ma says 'Oh, yous don't do nothing in this house'. But she doesn't realize that, like, there'll be a pile a dishes, right, and she'll say 'Yous don't do anything', but she doesn't realize that them wont the only pile a dishes in that day because we do help. We tidy wer own rooms, wer dress wer selfs and, normally we don't, we're never in to have big meals, so wer just go in and we make wer selfs snacks. Exceptin if it's an occasion or, if me ma's done some cooking, so" (307-315).*

Conflict also permeates Sarah and Margaret's accounts. Sarah complained bitterly about her sister doing nothing and Margaret is angry because her brother does nothing and her father has a very haphazard attitude. *"Erm, me da, he's just, na, he doesn't do anything. He, he does when he wants to. If he starts tidying up, he'll do the whole house. He won't just tidy up the sitting room. He, he starts and does the whole house"* (261-268). Even though Margaret's mother works, she usually does the housework if she is in, if her mother's not in Margaret will do it.

These are sentiments Danielle can relate to, she thinks her father is haphazard in his attitude to housework, his major contribution being that he sometimes does some cooking. Her mother will *"just tell me and (...) me sister, to er, like, make wer beds and that and clean wer own rooms, but she doesn't ask for nothing else"* (87-96). Other than that her mother does the bulk of the housework.

In many of these accounts I get the feeling of domestic chaos and dissention, dissention from the teenage women who won't do domestic work and mothers who are unable or unwilling to enforce compliance. Of course, my feelings probably result from a comparison with the military precision with which housework was done in my childhood family where vocalizing dissent would have been unthinkable. Melanie raised this point earlier when she said that in previous generations women didn't have much of a say, didn't voice an opinion. I don't think this was necessarily peculiar to my family, I think many women of my generation and class had similar experiences, which makes the changes in the teenage women's experience all the more visible.

Danielle recognizes these changes. In her view a separation between mothers and daughters responsibilities regarding domestic work started to occur in her mother's

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generation. She said that in her grandmother's time the women had to *"do everything in the house like, me erm, me nana was a only child an erm, she used to help her mam an that, clean up, and do house work an that (...) an it wasn't like that as much when me ma was little ... but, me ma still helped me nana"* (195-198).

Jo agrees with Danielle's change comments and adds thoughts concerning female employment. She thinks that women *"didn't really have a choice whether to work or not, well, me gran's age. Cause that was like when women didn't really work. An me ma, it was still male dominated, wasn't it?"* She doesn't think *"there was many job opportunities like, the higher places, like high paid jobs and things. It was most like, shop assistants an things like that"* (491-493).

The division of domestic labour has certainly changed in her own childhood family, here everyone shares the housework, including her mother's boyfriend and her brothers, a change she is very much aware of. *"It's just all changed now from the olden days, hasn't it. Men never used to de anything, used to work and that was it. But it's changed now. Well, in my view it has. There's loadsa men help tidy up an that these days, help round the house"* (226-229). Claire too thinks domestic responsibilities are changing, *"me dad, he is, he's starting to do a lotta things now, helping her out"* (155-166).

Jo, Danielle and Claire may perceive these shifts in the performance of domestic tasks as evidence of change, but they are still articulated as helping 'her' out. Collins (1985), in a study conducted in Middlesborough, makes an important distinction between doing the work and having responsibility for seeing that the work gets done. Men may be 'helping her out', but it is the woman who still shoulders the responsibility for ensuring that everything gets done. A man may cook the evening meal, but it is generally the woman who is responsible for the marketing and probably the cleaning up afterwards. In this sense domestic labour continues to be *'reinforced by an ideology of gender'* (Collins:1985:63).

Although the teenage women are more likely to voice their dissent than the mature women were and although they can point to examples of domestic change, I think they, like Griffin's (1985) participants have probably *'raised their eyebrows and*

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*shrugged their shoulders at the monumental effort involved in getting brothers – or fathers – to do any housework’* (pp37-38).

And on what basis should they expect change anyway? Even in this technological age marketing strategies continue to reinforce the traditional female ideology, with only a passing nod to the glamorous aspects of the ‘new man’, who seems to have all but disappeared from current advertising. Commercial after commercial now show smiling women – or more precisely mothers – performing mindless tasks, like the detergent advert that shows the son smirking at himself in the mirror in his shiny white shirt, *‘like any snotnose git with a doormat mother’* (Greer:1999:131). Women continue to carry the major responsibility for domestic work and childcare, whether they are employed outside the home or not, which suggests that the domestic equality discourse espoused by the teenage women may become problematic in practice.

If one accepts that children learn by seeing **and** doing, by knowledge **and** practice, then there is evidence to suggest that the teenage women think that traditional female roles are breaking down. For example, the teenage women have observed that mothers have the main responsibility for domestic work; they have observed that fathers generally don’t, but through their practice they are changing the traditional script. Whilst they may voluntarily help mother out, in general there seems to be no expectation that they will do so as a matter of regular routine. Not only are the teenage women changing the scripts for themselves, but some of their parents are colluding in this script change by not compelling daughters to do domestic work and by some of the men making a contribution – however minimal – to the domestic workload.

In the context of who does what in the home, one has to consider more than domestic tasks, one has to consider who does what in relation to children and childcare.

Melanie spoke of her grandmother with wonder, *“Well I mean, I was even shocked at me nana, cause me nana, she was a child of eleven. And I thought ‘Phew, no’”* (328-329). We agreed that this wouldn’t have been all that unusual in her grandmother’s time. Whether Melanie’s nana wanted eleven children is another

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matter, one that Marie astutely picks up when she says that women are sometimes pressured by their families to conform to social norms, *"'cause I've got a great-nana as well, and (...) her mam says 'when you gonna settle down', an everything. She got married young. And then me nana got married quite young as well. And had her kids quite young"* (370-373).

Whereas Marie's grandmothers had their children early, Margaret thinks that her mother had her quite late, *"she had me when she was 23. I think that's like, well, it's not old, but it's older than wor it is today cause like, you get 14 year olds having kids now, so"* (407-412).

This is interesting because during the 1980s and 90s age at first birth has increased. National Statistics (IR15) data notes that *'Despite the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the United Kingdom, there is an overall trend towards later childbearing'*. National Statistics state that women's mean age at first birth within marriage was 25.4 in 1981; 27.5 in 1991 and 29.6 in 2000. For births outside of marriage, the ages are 23.5 in 1981; 24.8 in 1991 and 26.5 in 2000. These are national statistics that do not differentiate by social class. McRobbie (2000) does intersect age at first birth with class, remarking that most *'working-class women in our society ... have their first baby in their early 20s. It is anomalous, and atypical to put off motherhood in the way that white middle-class are now doing ... For white working-class women fertility is part of the marriage bargain, all the more reason to prove it early on'* (p168). Margaret seems to think that women are having their first child at an even earlier age, possibly because of the high profile of teenage pregnancy. As she cites 14-year-old girls becoming mothers, there is an implication that marriage is not a necessary prerequisite and that girls are sexually active at a very young age, which has legal implications.

Other than the subject of teenage pregnancy, the teenage women didn't say very much about children and childcare at all, other than that childcare was mainly a mother's responsibility. However the topic of teenage pregnancy is one they all talked about a great deal, this is a topic I come back to in Chapter Eleven.



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Moving on from childcare, Claire reverted to the earlier topic of employment and linked it with education. Talking about her mother's generation, she believes that *"some women woulda tried to get jobs but they would've only been part-time jobs an jobs men wouldn't wanna do"* (196-204). She thinks her mother *"probably wanted to, a, a professional job, a full-time job but, she ended up erm, as a sewing machinist so. She'd probably like to do something berra and have, got a berra education (...)* Well, that she wishes she had a berra chance and to try harder, the way people are today. I don't think she woulda been to go to university then and things. There's more, longer education to do now, so" (130-151). Mary agrees, she too thinks that women *"would have jobs, but I don't think it would be like proper careers"* (302).

Many of the teenage women's mothers are employed, but earning money is the motivation, not job satisfaction or career aspirations. Margaret's mother, for example, *"went straight into a job. I think that's, the main thing was money. It still is these days. You need money to do everything (...)* She mighta thought she wanted a life, she wanted a career, but, I don't think it was that ... popular in them days. You had to get a job as soon as you left or you wor on the streets" (381-393).

Although Danielle speaks with admiration about her mother, she also sees the burden role expansion can be. Her mother *"works night shift and that, then she'll come in, in the morning, she'll only be in bed for, a few hours and then she'll ger up and she'll start tidying up and everything. And you can tell she's really tired but she says she gorra do it, so she does it. An like, she's never lazy or nothing like that. She just, does everything"* (258-262). On the other hand, Samantha blames her mother – a lone parent – for not working and has little sympathy with her mother's regrets, *"I don't think she's gor a chance of getting a job anyway (...)* She's just, never had a job in her life, so, they're not gonna take her now (...) She shoulda thought of it" (440-448).

The majority of the teenage women's mothers work outside the home and their attitudes affect the way their daughters perceive employment. All these teenage women expect to work, indeed, Walkerdine *et al* (2001) are of the view that *'Young women from erstwhile working-class families have to face the realm of work throughout their adult lives, unlike any other generation before them'* (p21).

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Whereas the teenage women think that the only type of work available to their mothers was low-paid, low-status and part-time, that careers or good jobs were not an option, when they relate the concept of work to themselves, there is a change. As Sarah put it, both her sister and her mother's jobs are not very good jobs and concluded, "*I want to be different to them, get a good job*" (119-123). Sarah's remarks imply that a mother's negative example can be used as a counter-model, as a motivator to achieve greater things for oneself.

The teenage women's childhood families are positioned in the post-traditional social order of the late 1980s, a time of major controversy concerning women's employment and the family, or, more accurately, women's place within the family. The New Right championed the traditional family which situates women in the home. This highly public resurrection of traditional family discourse has been seen as a backlash against 1960s permissiveness, moral laxity, increasing welfare dependency (Faludi:1991) and '*feminist demands for women's rights to control their own lives*' (Murray:1996:31-2), demands that included free birth control, abortion on demand and wider nursery provision (Sked:1987).

Of course, the debate concerning the demise of the family was not new, and neither was the attack on women's rights. Women throughout history have been scapegoated for all manner of social ills and the feminist backlash was no different, feminism challenges the central concept of male authority. Right-wing advocates claim that the consequences of aberrant female behaviour are divorce, juvenile delinquency, crime, illiteracy, unemployment, the spread of AIDS and an increase in welfare dependency (Abbott & Wallace:1992).

But there's more to it than that. At the hub of this discourse is the belief that the traditional family is the cornerstone of behaviour regulation and control. Muncie & Sapsford (1997) make the point that, '*Institutions, laws and welfare policies are constructed around this stereotypic form*' (p18) thereby reinforcing its legitimacy. Within the traditional family everyone knows their place and what is expected of them; the man is the head of the household, the sole arbiter and judge. Feminism challenges the legitimacy of this male power; hence the backlash is an attempt to reassert male power and control through the institution of the family.

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As much as the Conservative government desired the return of the traditional family, the fact was that the 1980s saw continued increases in women's workforce participation, in non-marital sexual relations, in co-habitation, divorce and lone-parent families. Of the eleven teenage women, six (Louise, Marie, Jo, Sarah, Samantha and Christina) live in lone-mother families and trying to turn back the social tide is an impossibility, even if considered desirable.

As a result of the legislative changes of the 1960s and 70s, power relations between men and women have shifted, women are now '*significantly freer to avoid oppressive relationships*' (Fox Harding:1996:100) than they have been in the past, a situation that is hardly likely to be reversed easily. Indeed, for many women there are benefits to being a lone parent. A woman can decide what is best for her and her children without reference or deferment to a man. She can exercise her right to claim benefits which, although limited, may be more reliable than monies extracted from husbands or partners through the more formal procedures of the courts. Perhaps the main disadvantage is poverty, and yet some women weigh poverty and personal autonomy against subjugation and find marriage wanting.

There is no doubt that part of this familial evolution stems from women's participation in the labour force. Although women do not generally earn as much as men, the fact that they do earn and can have economic independence means that they have choices, one of which is the ability to manage their own households. According to Fox Harding (1996), "*Non-working mothers were a minority by the 1970s. By the end of the 1980s, 63 per cent of mothers with dependent children were economically active*" (p6). As a consequence the concept of women with dependent children working has become an accepted social norm. The New Right may have preferred a return to the traditional model of marriage and family life, but in reality, the fact that a "*majority of mothers now work makes it politically difficult to express this view*" (Lewis:1992:31), particularly as it would affect the national economy and possibly influence the way in which women vote.

Louise thinks that these changes started in her mother's generation and were brought about by education and joint action, "*I think mostly education cause you start learning, like ages ago how they say that women were too fragile, and things like*

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*that. Well I think it's just education because people are learning and people are ecknowledging that women are just as good as men. So I think that women just started, just started to stand up for their selves. And they've got, and instead of one person, they've all got together and people started listening to them"* (277-283). In other words, women found a collective voice with which to articulate their resistance and thereby effect change.

Thus, the decade in which Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary were born presented them with numerous contradictions and choices. The New Right advocated that women should return to traditional families and lambasted feminism for all manner of social ills. Increasing numbers of women were combining motherhood with paid employment and diverse family forms were becoming increasingly visible, particularly those where women headed their own households. Indeed, Close (1985) remarks that in Britain there is '*no dominant family form*' (p14) and that this diversity is acquiring social legitimacy.

These teenage women know that their mothers and grandmothers carried the main domestic and childcare burden, they also know that there is less expectation for them to do so, at least as far as domestic work is concerned. They know that women/mothers work and can hardly contemplate not working themselves. They know that they have a right to articulate their needs, desires and feelings, whereas their mothers and grandmothers didn't.

In the next chapter Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary take all these conflicting childhood experiences with them on their educational journey and we talk about their school experiences.

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## **Chapter Ten**

### **1990s Schooldays – The Best Days of Our Lives**

***What are we educating women for? To raise this question is to face the whole problem of women's role in society. We are uncertain about the end of women's education precisely because the status of women in our society is fraught with contradictions and confusion.***

(Komarovsky: Women in the Modern World)

In the mid-1990s, Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary took many contradictions to school with them concerning women's role. Has their secondary education resolved these contradictions or added to them? In this chapter the teenage women talk about their attitudes to school, the importance of education for girls, gender issues and maternal influence.

All the teenage women attend Galitt High comprehensive school. Comprehensive education replaced the tripartite system and at its inception was heralded as a means of abolishing the inequities of selection, improving working-class educational opportunities and occupational mobility. Brown (1989) argues that in practice the comprehensive schools did not live up to these ideals, they did not deliver the goods. Educational standards were falling, with negative consequences for Britain's economic performance, and the school system was in crisis. According to the Conservative right wing, comprehensivisation had sacrificed competition and excellence for a '*socialist notion of social justice, and that there [was] a need to defend merit, standards and achievement against those who promote mediocrity in the name of social justice*' (Brown:1989:34).

Education does not operate in a vacuum; it is part of the wider society and the New Right wanted to infuse education with its ideology of individual responsibility, traditional authority, leadership and the reproduction of an elite culture. To achieve

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this goal, the government required centralised control of education, which meant stripping power from the Local Education Authorities (LEA). Indeed, the LEAs – particularly left-wing LEAs – were lambasted as the root cause of the educational crisis. The ‘looney-left’ were accused of being *‘more interested in peddling left-wing propaganda than raising educational standards. Evidence advanced for this includes the existence of anti-racist and anti-sexist policies, and the teaching of peace studies and sex education’* (Brown:1989:37). This was a situation the New Right were not prepared to tolerate, hence the sustained attack on teacher’s professionalism and the move to centralised government control of education. As a result of these changes education became subject to the operation of market forces and parent choice, as encapsulated in the Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA).

The ERA introduced a national curriculum and testing strategy to ensure that all pupils studied ‘appropriate’ subjects to a nationally agreed standard. Thus, just as the 1944 Education Act laid the foundation for my own educational experience, so the ERA lays the foundation for the teenage women’s educational experience.

The terms of the ERA, most of which were incorporated into the Education Act 1996, state that pupils in England and Wales attending maintained schools are to receive an education that is *‘balanced, broadly based and relevant to his or her needs ...which prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life’* (Holt et al.:1999:Section 4-9).

Formal assessment at the age of 7, 11, 14 and 16 *‘represents part of the attempt to provide parents with the necessary consumer information to decide which school to send their child to’* (Brown:1989:40). The irony is that whilst the rhetoric appeared to offer parental choice and individual freedom, in practice the education system became more uniform and controlled than ever before and has been described as the *‘spectre of ‘Big Brother’ imposing drear and dangerous uniformity’* (Coote & Campbell:1987:193).

Examining the rhetoric, Gilmour (1992) suggests that parental choice is nothing more than a smoke screen. Parents may well be able to express their preference for a particular school, but that is nothing new. Parents can apply to whatever school they

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want, but there is no guarantee that they will get the school of their choice, and *'parents who are denied their first choice, which they think that 'parental choice' has promised them, feel shortchanged'* (Gilmour:1992:205-06). In this free market some schools become over-subscribed and are able to choose the pupils they want based on criteria of their own devising. Whatever criteria are implemented, this practice continues to reinforce educational selection.

Having been subject to the selection process and its consequences myself at age eleven, I feel apprehensive about the current testing strategy. As Apple (1996) remarks, testing at ages 7, 11 and 14 is now used as *'a mechanism for differentiating children more rigidly against fixed norms'* (p32), which may be seen as constituting aspects of Foucauldian surveillance and control. Are pupils who don't meet these fixed norms going to be classified as failures, with all that being designated a failure implies for a person's adult life? Whatever the answer to this question there is no doubt that the government performed a marketing miracle in selling this system to parents. However, what has to be understood about this parentocracy is that a *'child's education is dependent upon the wealth and wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils'* (Brown:1989:41), with wealth being the operative criterion. The education system is no longer a meritocracy – if indeed it ever was.

The teenage women would have been 13/14 years old when Labour came to power in 1997 and so Labour's education policies affect them too. Prior to the election the Labour view was that the *'first priority is to raise general educational standards ... Performance must be regularly assessed in objective terms that parents can understand'* (Mandelson & Liddle:1996:92). Almost as an after thought they said that New Labour intend to *'ensure that children, whatever the nature of their talent and whatever their social background, have a fair chance to achieve their full potential. These are traditional Labour objectives ... a united society with real equality of opportunity for all'* (Mandelson & Liddle:1996:93). However, they added that this did not mean a return to the old comprehensive system, indeed New Labour seemed keen to put some distance between themselves and the comprehensive ideal. In the Independent (28.2.96), David Blunkett, Labour's education spokesman, said *'Thirty years of comprehensive schooling had failed successive generations of children and would have to change'*. From this perspective, Labour followed the

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Conservative's emphasis on improving standards, continuous testing and the attainment of qualifications.

Whatever the shade of political manoeuvrings, the National Curriculum and testing strategy are an accepted part of the educational experience of these teenage women. I asked them to talk about their educational experiences, their attitudes to school, what they like and dislike. In their accounts teachers and friends feature strongly.

Louise likes school and one of the reasons for her positive attitude is that her teachers *"are very friendly, like, they don't like, talk down to yer. Erm, they gi yer a lot of advice, a lot of help. Erm, there's a lot of, like, we have like, discos and stuff ... the teachers, like, they'll go out of their way to like, do what you want. Like they do, they've had concerts on because there's been people who enjoyed singing. And there's like, clubs, lunchtime clubs, things like that. And it's just, it's really good"* (25-31).

Danielle also likes school and for her it is because of her friends and her reflections on the alternatives, *"I see all me friends. And if I didn't come to school I'd just be bored, if I didn't have a job, sittin about the house. But erm, most of me friends, why I like comin"* (21-23). Jo agrees, the social aspect of school is important to her too, *"seeing all me friends at break time, dinner time"* (28-29). Thus, for Louise, Danielle and Jo, school is a positive experience where they have the respect and cooperation of teachers and a place where they can meet their friends.

On the other hand, Sarah and Melanie don't see it quite like this. With a slight laugh Sarah says that school is *"alright. Erm, I don't think you get that many erm, opportunities to do different things. It's all the same, every day ... Too much work"* (21-23). Melanie objects to the way she is treated by some teachers. *"Erm, ... I think I would say that at times they still treat wer the same as the pupils. Erm, like the uniform. I mean, I know you've got to wear a uniform, but maybe they could be a bit more relaxed with us. An, sometimes it, it's like erm, it's like we're still little Year 7's getting told off. Well, sometimes. I don't like people patronizing us, I really don't. I'd prefer if somebody just sat us down and told us, instead of like saying 'You will do this, and you won't do that'. I don't like getting dictated to. I don't, I really*



*don't. But I wouldn't mind if they like, just come along an says 'Do you know this', but instead of 'You will do this', where I, I'd put up a resistance an ... they don't make that difference. Even though you've made that difference, they see, still see yer as ...*" (92-116). She didn't finished the sentence but I think she meant that she feels like a young adult who is being treated like a child by some of her teachers.

Given that the teenage women place such importance on being with friends at school, many of them expressed anxieties inherent in the breakup of friendships as individuals leave school and start to make their way in the adult world. In some ways these friendship breakups are a form of bereavement insofar as they are about loss, sadness and anxiety. Not only are these anxieties related to the breakup of friendships, they are also related to worries about their own futures, and to having to take responsibility for their own actions and decisions.

Margaret was pensive, *"you know, we're in the 6<sup>th</sup> form now, well when we were in school it was berra, cause like, we had, like lessons, we divn't have lessons often, we had wer own school friends. But now it's like (...) most of our friends have left. An, erm, like we come in an, we have a free lesson first. So sometimes it's really, really boring at school, like, in 6<sup>th</sup> form, that's the way I find it. It was much berra in actual school than it is in 6<sup>th</sup> form (...) Except in 6<sup>th</sup> form you gorra motivate yourself. You haven't got the teachers there to motivate yer, so (...) It's not what I expected it to be"*.

What had you expected it to be like? I asked.

*"A lot, much berra. Erm, one of the main reasons why I stayed on was to not leave me friends, cause that's, and then that was stupid, cause I think I done a stupid thing there, cause like, I have to think of mesel, not think of me friends. But like, most of them just went off and left, so"* (34-52).

As well as comments about teachers and friends, something that Louise feels strongly about is having a voice in her school life, a factor she thinks women of her mother's and grandmother's generation would not have had. Talking about previous generations Louise said, *"I think they was very strict. You didn't have much say, no freedom of speak or anything like that. And I don't think they woulda had like, council rep, like school rep where all the kids in classes could get together and*

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*comp, not complain, but like, talk about issues at school and how they could change em. They just had no say in how the school's run whatsoever"* (257-263).

This concept of having a voice in school affairs links with the teenage women's access to voice in their families in relation to domestic work, (Chapter Nine) which I believe is a marked change between the mature and the teenage women.

Thus, the teenage women express mixed feelings about school. On the one hand teachers are helpful and there are a variety of activities on offer. On the other hand, some teachers behave in a patronizing way and seem blind to the fact that they are dealing with young women, not children. Rather than variety, some of the teenage women think that each day is very much the same, boring and there is pressure in the amount of work required. Perhaps the one thing they agree on is the importance of friends. Some see school as a social environment where they can meet friends and have a laugh. For others, 6<sup>th</sup> form has come to represent a period of breakup and loss as friends start to leave. The anxieties they feel illustrate the fact that this is a time of major transition in their lives, a time when they are having to '*transform a 'childhood' gender identity to an adult one*' (Whitehead:1994:56).

In talking about their school experiences, some of the teenage women showed an awareness of the discourses that underpin educational aims. For example, when probed about the importance of education for girls today they strongly articulate the link between education, qualifications and employment, and in the process imply that for them employment is inevitable rather than a matter of choice.

Claire believes that education "*gives yer berra qualifications, as well, so yer can ger a berra job, so*" (29-30). Christina nodded, "*gives yer like, options, what you want to do in your life*" (73-77). Danielle thinks that gender distinctions are irrelevant in this discussion because education is important for everyone, "*so that they gerra good job ... because both, both like, female and male wanna job, so, if they study they'll gerra berra job*" (55-60).

Whilst the teenage women know that good qualifications are an essential prerequisite to a good job, practice doesn't always match theory as Melanie demonstrated when

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she spoke frankly about her previous performance. *"Erm, well, I didn't think school was very important until a few years ago when I, when I was deciding where I wanted to go and what path I wanted to take. Erm, now, I wanna go as far as I can with my education. I mean, I don't know what I want to be or do, but I wanna do something that's interesting, an I wanna try a variety of things, an just take me education as far as I can take it basically"* (27-32).

Previously she hadn't thought education was important because *"it never interested us, I couldn't find something I was interested in, it was boring, so I didn't pay much attention. So I kinda slipped off the ..."* (36-38). It was poor exam results that pulled her back. *"Erm, I know, I know I could've done betta, cause I was in all the top sets basically. Er, an I just like, well, basically had a talk with meself, if that doesn't sound too odd. An I thought 'I can do betta than this'. So I come back, I got me grades all up. I re-sat them an, yeh, I'm getting on the path. Yes, so I was a bit stumbled at first, but I'm heading there, where I wanna go"* (42-50).

Melanie demonstrates mature self-reflection about the education-employment link and what her adult life might be like if she doesn't get back on track, and just as importantly she shows that the school is flexible enough to facilitate second attempts, so she will not leave school as an educational failure.

Louise sees educational attainment as a good general preparation for adult life but questions whether it can be more specific than this when *"most, at this age, right, nobody really knows what they wanna do, do they? And then, in the future they find something they really wanna do and they think 'Oh well, I needed that', like that qualification. They think 'Oh well, I wish I had it' (...). So I think its really important that they just do loads of different courses till they know what they gonna do. Like ger a bit a everything, so"* (95-101). This approach seems to echo Melanie's point about taking her education as far as she can, even though she doesn't yet know what she wants to do. They might not know what they want to do yet, but they position themselves as paid employees which suggests that full-time wife and motherhood has a lower priority than employment in their current consciousness.

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Whether they are oriented to a general educational preparation or something more specific, the subjects studied and the examinations taken are going to be influential in directing their future options.

Amongst these teenage women, three main subject areas clearly stand out, Information & Communication Technology (ICT), Travel & Tourism and Business Studies, with nine of the teenage women taking one or a combination of these subjects. Thus Galitt High School appears to have a vocational rather than an academic focus, a point not lost on Mary whose subjects are history, media studies and art, *'at school the main subjects are business. And because we don't do business they [teachers] just, I don't think they take very much notice'* (176-178). Louise is taking ICT and reflects on the necessity of doing so, *"In fact I don't like, really, really enjoy it, but it's alright. It's good yer know"* (89-90). Louise thus demonstrates a mature attitude to a subject she doesn't particularly like but which she realises is necessary to the majority of types of employment.

The school's vocational focus does not exclude its pupils from pursuing higher education as many universities have vocationally oriented faculties and courses, however, it may determine the kind of employment opportunities the teenage women will be qualified for, and thus restrict their employment choices. How much choice do the teenage women have in the subjects they study? Mary points to an answer when she says that the school's main focus is business-related. If this is actually the case, are more resources channelled into these subjects than others, and is this a case of the school determining what the students will study, rather than the students having a more open choice?

As we were talking about subjects and exams the teenage women themselves raised a number of gender-related issues. Jo brought up the matter of girls' achievement. With a slight laugh she said *"there's a lorra girls out there just as good as the boys ... if not betta"* (277-278). Melanie agreed but said that regardless of their achievements girls are still subject to the pressures of traditional femininity discourse, *"the lads get very jealous if you, if you erm, get higher grades or, if you do something that makes them look inadequate. And they think that you should be in the house, you should be with the pair of rubber gloves washing or cleaning an, their*

*socks and things. Yeh, there still is that*" (141-145). Sarah joined the debate asserting that the traditional stereotype no longer has validity, *"erm, everyone thinks they should be stuck in a kitchen but ... It's just the same, they can do anything they want really, so, ger a good education you can ger a good job. Good qualifications then they can do anything they want"* (54-57). From what Melanie and Sarah say there seems to be a disparity between girls' and boys' role attitudes, which may be one of the consequences of an emergent female achievement discourse.

This female achievement discourse is being developed and disseminated by diverse voices. For example, in 1996, when the teenage women were 12/13 years old, the Times (26.1.1996) reported that, *'Girls outshine boys in English and Mathematics in tests at seven, 11 and 14, the first full set of results disclosed yesterday'*; and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) (1999) data for examination passes in Great Britain for the period 1996/7 show the following data for male/female performance:

GCSEs & SCE Standard Grades 5 or more grades A-C	Girls 51%	Boys 41%
No graded results	Girls 6%	Boys 9%
2 or more GCE A levels or 3 or more SCE Highers	Girls 32%	Boys 26%

In light of such achievements, Francis (2000) investigated the hypothesis that gendered ability constructions have changed as a result of changing achievement patterns. 75% of Francis's sample said there was no difference in ability between males and females. Interestingly, where differences were perceived, the difference was generally attributed to female superiority, suggesting that there may be *'a new, emerging awareness of female achievement at secondary school level'* (Francis:2000:43). The students in Francis's study gave a number of reasons for this change; e.g. girls work harder than boys, girls are more intelligent and better at understanding, girls mature faster and go out socially less than boys.

And on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2000 the Times reported, *'Different for Girls: A-level success is a tribute to women's changing aspirations. After trailing their male peers for many years, female candidates have this time achieved a higher percentage of A grades ... Even 30 years ago ... Women were more often than not expected to become wives and mothers, and were thus widely considered not to need more than a basic education. Female aspirations are now transformed. Almost every schoolgirl*

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*expects a fulfilling career, and later marriage and childbirth mean that this applies even to those who plan later to become full-time mothers'*, and year on year this message has been repeated in diverse forms. McRobbie (2000) is of the opinion that young women are fully aware of the need for qualifications if they are to obtain the kind of employment that will provide them with the financial independence required to manage their own affairs that with *'decent qualifications the future is much more optimistic'* (p204).

However, future prospects are by no means straightforward. Female academic achievement and changing role expectations need to be considered with caution, for example, these teenage women could encounter conflict when faced with their male peers' role expectations. Emphasising this point Francis (2000) suggests that discourses of equality, achievement and individual freedom *'falsely lead girls to believe that gender inequality ... is a thing of the past, masking continuing patterns of inequality'* (p46).

In addition to male peer attitudes, factors such as geographical area and class have a bearing on the situation as they intersect with gender. In terms of geographical area, the 'State of the Region' report for 2003 (IR25) suggests that in the North East qualification levels are below the national average and that 35% of the population have no qualifications at all, so it is not a foregone conclusion that all these teenage women will achieve academically.

When it comes to class, McRobbie (2000) notes that girls who live in comfortable homes and have affluent parents may very well achieve academically and gain rewarding employment, but this *'rosy ideal is countered by the harsh reality of growing up in a low-income, lone-parent household'* (pp198-9) where continuing education through A-levels and university can place severe pressure on less affluent families. Similarly, Walkerdine *et al* (2001) remark that *'social class inequalities in education remain substantial and persistent'* (p111). In their own research, the majority of their middle-class girls went on to further and higher education, whereas their working-class girls did not. Walkerdine *et al* make the point that some commentators suggest that class has disappeared from the agenda in recent years,

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largely due to the gendered nature of the debate and its emphasis on the underachievement of boys.

However, class cannot be ignored because, *'just as it always has been, girls' academic performance is cross-cut by class'* (ibid:112). In talking about female achievement, the media are mainly referring to middle-class girls and *'what is being overlooked here is that by no means all girls are doing well, though it would be difficult to guess this from the sensationalist headlines'* (ibid:112). This is not to suggest that no change has taken place. Increasing numbers of girls from professional and wealthy families are doing well both at school and at university, which in itself constitutes change, but despite the sensationalist headlines not all girls, particularly not working-class girls, are doing well, *'there is still a huge class divide in attainment in Britain'* (ibid:p112). Given that these teenage women live in the North East of England, and the majority live in low-income, lone-parent families, are their education and career aspirations misplaced? Are they likely to have their dreams of a better future dashed?

Many of the teenage women are aware of the inequalities that continue to be barriers to their advancement. For example, Melanie spoke about sex role conflict: *"they've got this stigma, girls. I feel they have. They've got to be in the house (...) waiting for the man to come in, cook him his tea, an, I don't like that idea at all. I mean, I'm, I wouldn't say I was a full-blown feminist but, I will not, I mean, when me da comes in, I mean, yes, I make an occasional tea but, he, it's pointless him expectin it. I cannot iron, an I won't even try to iron. I'm not that keen on cooking, but I will when I have to. But I don't like that sort of domestic"* (129-137).

As Melanie talked it became apparent that some male teachers perpetuate sex stereotyping too. Although she laughed when she told me about one male teacher, her words show how she actually feels about it. *"He is very, very sexist. And he believes a woman's place is in the home. An that, that annoys me, because I thought, why, we're living in 2001 an, perceptions haven't that much ... he going, you know, like 'I believe you should be in the house, and you should be looking after this an that'. And I thought 'Oh, you sound like a pre-historic dinosaur'"* (356-370). I asked her if she thought this was a wind up from the teacher – apparently not.

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The teenage women are aware of the female achievement discourse and position themselves within it. However, they are also aware of the conflict inherent in this change. Boys continue to hold traditional constructions of women, constructions that are reinforced by some male teachers. They are also aware that constant reinforcement of female ability and achievement merely masks the continuing inequalities they are likely to face in their adult lives.

From the teenage women's accounts it is possible to argue that their mothers are wittingly or unwittingly colluding in the deception – if that's what it is – by maintaining that ability and achievement will lead to improved life chances, but then, perhaps they too have been seduced by the achievement discourse.

Marie says her mother tells her that if she works hard she'll have *"a berra life, berra job and, nice home an everything"* (325). Jo says her mother approved of her return to school *"an tryin to make something of me life ... she'll say she doesn't want me to make the same mistakes she did ... Like not doin her best at school, tryin to ger a job an that"* (318-329). Sarah says her mother advises her to *"work hard at school to get good qualifications"* (165-167).

Margaret sees her mother as positioning herself as a negative role model. Nevertheless, her mother constantly emphasises the importance of education and advises Margaret to work hard *"because she never ever did (...) Like she worked straight away from when she was 16 (...) But, like, in the early years her and ... her brother used to, they used to knock off an that. But, she's not thick. She, she is actually ... in, educated. She's, she knows what's she's doin, but she's always wanted me, me brothers want to go to university, an like I want to go to college, so. She wants us to stick in like, have a career and make sure that we make ... money an that. Cause she's like, a care assistant but like, she, I'm sure she wanted do like, something further, like be a doctor or, or something like that. But like, cause she knocked off and that"* (208-220).

Marie says her mother expresses regrets about her own education, she *"didn't finish school ... she wished she had stuck in an everything. And cause she had me when*



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*she was young, so she says to me that 'You've just to stick in at school and do well' and everything ... That's why she makes me go all the time (laughter)" (307-321).*

Like Margaret and Marie, Melanie translates her mother's poor school performance into wasted life opportunities which she distances from her own life. *"Erm, well, I mean, I love me ma to bits but (...) she didn't really enjoy school at all an, I see her life an I don't want that. I mean, she's in the house 24:7 lookin after me an me brother an da an ... Her life is just so borin. And I, I really said it to her, I says 'I love yer to bits ma', I says, 'but I couldn't have your, your life'. An she says 'I understand'. She says, 'Because if I could turn the clock back', she says, 'I wouldn't have my life either'. She really regrets that she didn't do something with her life. But like I say, she can still do something with her life, but she feels that she's old an, she cannot keep up with technology an things like that"* (182-206).

Christina's mother left school aged 15, something Christina can't begin to imagine doing herself, she wouldn't *"feel like, educated enough, leaving at 15"* (88-90). Mary's parents say to her, *"at the age of what we are now, they say, they had been like, working for years already, an stuff like that"* (126-127).

These mothers appear to place a lot of pressure on their daughters to achieve at school and they express regrets at not achieving more at school themselves, they regret leaving at 15 or 16 and going straight into a job. Of course their regrets are expressed relative to current educational and employment contexts where more women now go to university and have full-time jobs and careers, rather than their own school-leaving context when it was more the norm for working-class girls to leave at 15 or 16 and go straight into employment. Like Christina and Mary's mothers, I left school at 15 and I considered myself to be an adult. Christina and Mary don't feel that they would be educated enough at 15 to start work. I don't recall ever considering such an equation, leaving school and starting work at 15 was just the way things were.

Many of the teenage women's mothers have low-skilled, low-status, part-time jobs, and from what they say it seems that their mothers are not presenting themselves as employment role models to be emulated, in the same way as they are not presenting

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themselves as domestic role models to be emulated. Rather they are motivated to prevent their daughters ending up in dead-end jobs similar to their own. They see education as the most accessible way for their daughters to achieve good jobs and economic security. In this sense, mothers are presenting themselves as anti-models, encouraging their daughters to pursue lifestyles different to their own.

Whether they feel adult enough or not, the option of leaving school at this stage is a strong inducement for some pupils. Claire said that some of her friends *“gerra bit sick of school, so ... some of them have stayed on in the 6<sup>th</sup> form but, I mean, one of me friends wanted to stay on but she gorra job, so”* (34-39).

Having a job represents adult status, it means having personal money and freedom, glittering prizes when set against school, little money and staying in. The lure of employment and money constitutes an additional pressure as the teenage women try to decide whether to continue with their education or seek employment.

At the start of this chapter I spoke about the contradictions the teenage women took to school with them and asked if their school experiences resolved or added to these contradictions. I would suggest that their school experiences have added to the contradictions. Compared with their mothers, the teenage women do have a voice in school affairs, they do have access to qualifications and they are conscious of a femininity based on educational achievement and employment opportunities, but at the same time they know that traditional role expectations remain strong. Furthermore, their mothers both personify and reject the traditional female role, and encourage their daughters to reject it also. Their mothers subscribe to the female educational achievement discourse and put pressure on their daughters to gain qualifications which they see as the passport to improved life options.

Changes in femininity relating to ability and achievement are as yet at an embryonic stage, particularly in relation to working-class women, and there is a fear that these changes may prove to be nothing more than miasmas when the teenage women engage in relationships and employment.

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In the next chapter Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary and I talk about their aspirations and expectations for the future.

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## Chapter Eleven

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Crossroads

***[We] must realize that no one is actually free, that freedom is a concept, an ideal, with which everyone seeks to come to some accommodation.***

(Brookner: The Bay of Angels)

When I was leaving school in the mid-60s popular constructions of youth culture centred on music, fashion, make-up, coffee bars, folk clubs, all night parties, contraception and free love, drinking and drug taking. However, the reality for many of my female peers and myself was Sunday school and youth clubs, other than that few of us were allowed out at night. As Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary are preparing to leave school at the start of a new century, I asked them about their social lives.

Claire and Danielle go to town and hang about or they go to the pictures. Danielle looked depressed and said, "*There's not much to do*" (232), and even if there was, Claire said they didn't have a lot of free time because they usually have a lot of schoolwork to do. Marie seemed a little puzzled by the question, "*Erm ... don't know. Just go to me friend's house or they come to my house*" (392-3). Jo goes to the pictures, as well as, "*Ice skating, stuff like that. Football matches an that*" (188-9) with her friends.

Of all the teenage women, Margaret and Sarah have the fullest social lives. Margaret is in a band. She goes to a music studio after school, she sings at different venues and is involved in various drama and music projects. Sarah goes to "*a girls club. An I go to another club, erm, like a youth achievements award. You've gorra do challenges and you get erm, certificates ... An erm, I like to go swimming an bowling an, watch the telly. An that's it really*" (39-43).

Like the mature women, it seems that few of the teenage women engage in social activities outside the home in the evenings. Although some of the reasons why the

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teenage women do not go out at night may have changed, e.g. increased amounts of schoolwork, some of their reasons are the same as the mature women's, e.g. nowhere to go, nothing to do. It is likely that parents police the teenage women's social activities for much the same reasons as did the mature women's parents, that is as a means of controlling their behaviour and ensuring their safety, particularly in light of public perceptions regarding increased crime, drug use and the spread of AIDS.

The 1960s is popularly perceived as the start of a youth culture and consumer society, trends that have gathered pace through the succeeding decades. In the post-traditional social order Britain is a fully-fledged consumer society and the way in which products and ideologies are marketed probably has more effect on constructions of femininity for this generation than ever before. Take girls' magazines for example – their pages are full of attempts to sell everything from attitude formation to zit cream. Hollows (2000) suggests that while the *'equation of femininity and prettiness has not been displaced ... the new magazines ... produce a space in which femininities appear to be less fixed and more fluid'* (p172). That is, although *'dominant ideologies are pervasive, media texts reflect on a range of contradictory and conflicting ideologies, some of which may be oppositional'* (Taylor:1995:8). For example, on the one hand there are the traditional messages urging the importance of being slim and pretty, on the other there are messages urging girls to concentrate on themselves, that girls no longer need boys to validate who they are. In Taylor's view these oppositional readings represent little more than a diversion, rather than a means of changing gender relations. But then again, McRobbie (1994) muses that perhaps the *'state of flux in relation to what now constitutes feminine identity ... detected in the new girls' magazines as well as in the whole expansive field of the mass media ... may have 'unhinged' [girls] from their traditional gender position'* (p158).

Whichever side of the debate one takes, the messages of self-validation can be linked with emergent female cultures that actively resist the traditional feminine discourse. Greer (1999), for example, suggests that at the end of the twentieth century a bad girl culture has developed, she mentions 'lairy girls' or 'warrior babes', girls who are sexually aggressive. Leonard (1998) and Kearney (1998) talk about 'riot grrrls' who *'sought to challenge sexism in the underground music scene and encourage girls*

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and women to assert themselves' (Leonard:1998:102) and tackle issues of discrimination. Kearney (1998) comments that, *'Considering the subordination of adolescent girls in our society, it seems only natural that riot grrrls are separating from males and from older women as well as mainstream culture ... to establish and assert their own socio-political identity via a culture that remains distinctly girl-oriented and unadulterated'* (p149).

Blackman (1998) discusses how 'New Wave Girls' use music, clothes, stylistic solidarity and very close physical contact as a means of resisting traditional feminine stereotypes. This very close physical contact leads some boys to accuse the girls of lesbianism, a strategy boys use to maintain male dominance and categorise the girls as abnormal.

Just as my adolescent life bore no relation to public constructions of the 'Swinging 60s', so the teenage women's social activities are a far cry from Warrior Babes, Riot Grrrls and New Wave Girls constructions. And in similar ways to the mature women, the teenage women also experience conflict between public constructions of sexual freedom and traditional views regarding female reputation. Griffin (1985) claims that maintaining a good reputation continues to be crucial for girls and that it is boys who have the power to determine a girl's reputation, a point the teenage women emphasised themselves.

Louise doesn't believe that boys are bothered about other people's opinions, *"They don't do what their friends think. Girls do. Girls, the most important thing, for a girl, is her reputation. If she wants to have a good reputation she thinks she's gorra be like everybody else"* (428-431). Louise thought for a moment and then went on, *"It's like, a girl she gets called a slag for even, even if it was for no reason, she still a virgin, she doesn't have many lads. But she still gets called a slag. But just say she slept with like, one person, and this lad slept with about ten. He's like a stud and she's just a slag and, I just don't think that's right [and if she doesn't sleep with any boys] she's gay and she's this an she's that, an ... That's why you've gorra be like, independent, you yourself"* (447-460).

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Louise wasn't the only one who felt strongly about these issues. Margaret concurred with much of what Louise had said, although she also thinks that it's not just boys who create these situations, *"Like, it's the same, a lass's a slag if she sleeps with as many people. Even if she doesn't, there's rumours getting spread. Or, if lasses are jealous, lasses are jealous, doesn't, it, doesn't just, like, have to be lads"* (337-340).

So, for all there are alternative constructions of femininity available to the teenage women, traditional models of femininity still exert powerful pressure. These conflicts regarding femininity bubble away in the background as the teenage women face the more immediate question of what they are going to do when they leave school.

When I was leaving school my options were office, shop or factory work, followed by marriage and motherhood. On the eve of a new century, what do the teenage women consider their options to be? The main areas they mentioned are college, university, a job, a modern apprenticeship, the dole and staying at school. What I find interesting about these options is that they have an educational and occupational centrality; none of the teenage women mention domesticity as a significant option.

Louise, Marie, Sarah, Samantha, Melanie and Christina are considering going to college or university, an option that would have been unthinkable for working-class girls of my generation. Biggart & Furlong (1996) attribute this increased participation in continuing education to the widespread decline of the youth labour market. Certainly in the mid-60s employment was plentiful, but the economic recession of the 1980s and early 90s dramatically changed all that. Nevertheless, out of this structural change came the expansion of further and higher education which has led to girls' college and university expectations being raised on a scale not known before. Turning from what their options might be, the teenage women then told me what their aspirations for the future are, what they would most like to do.

Louise and Samantha are reasonably focused about their aspirations. Louise wants to be a teacher or possibly a singer, *"Erm, sports, like being a PE teacher, or being a, like, a singer and entertainer, so ... any one of them. Or even, I would like to teach it as well, like in either of them"* (149-151). She knows that being a teacher means

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continuing her education although she is vague about what qualifications she will need, *"for PE you'd have to have things like \_\_\_\_\_ Leisure and Recreation, like understand it, health & safety, things like that. And for the performing arts, I think you could probably just go straight in to that, couldn't you, just the basic way"* (156-161). She didn't elaborate on what the basic way is.

Samantha wants to work with children, *"That's what I've always wanted to do all me life. Me hopes are that I'm gonna be working in a nursery or make a child minder. That's what I've always wanted to do"* (128-134). Like Louise she knows she will need certain qualifications, but she too is vague about what these might be, *"English, ... and I think maths and science. I'm not quite sure. I know you definitely need English, so"* (157-158). She hasn't got the detail clear yet, but *"I've planned, like, staying on school so far but, I haven't planned college and university yet. But I'll get there somehow"* (173-174). She knows that some people let their aspirations slip once they have left school, that *"usually you just leave it behind. You don't bother thinking about your future. But I've got mine all sorted out"* (213-216).

Margaret too has clear aspirations; she has her heart set on being a singer. She talked about some of her activities towards this goal, *"We're in a band (...) we book a studio and that, like, after school. An it's like, for young kids to go and we learn like, equipment, how to use all the equipment and we sing different places"* (69-76).

What might you do if the singing career didn't work out? I asked.

Laughing she said, *"I don't like thinking about it. I, I don't, I can't imagine mesel in a 9 to 5 job. It's not what, I don't, I really don't like to think about it cause it's something like, I've dreamed about all me live, like what I'm gonna do, no matter what"* (163-173). In her out-of-school activities she is doing all she can to make her aspirations become a reality.

In complete contrast Claire, Jo and Marie have not yet decided on specific careers, but they believe that only through gaining qualifications will they be able to pursue any type of career at all. Jo, for instance, isn't sure about 'what' career a university education will lead to, but continuing with her education is important to her because she wants *"Just, er, wanna be quite high up"* (86). The difficulty with this is, if they



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don't know what they want to do, how are they to know what course of study is going to be the most beneficial to them?

Danielle is the only one in this group who does not aspire to university or college. Her goal is to leave school and start work, *"Probably in a travel agents or something. Something to do with tourism"* (64). *"I just wanna job. Earn some money"* (81-82).

Where aspirations are focused, e.g. teacher, childcare work, the teenage women know they will have to continue their education and gain qualifications to meet the entry requirements of their chosen occupation. Even where occupational choice is as yet unfocused, the teenage women feel that they should continue their education as a general preparation, in the belief that they won't get good jobs without them. In other words, without the requisite qualifications certain occupational opportunities are closed.

Regardless of the fact that the occupations of teacher, nursery nurse and office worker are traditional female occupations, I believe that these are atypical choices given the teenage women's familial-occupational context. One reason for this assertion is related to Trotman Reid & Stenson Stephens' (1985) examination of occupational status. They suggest that researchers often impose their own adult values on interpretations of young people's responses, when in fact young people have different value systems. Regarding occupational status, they suggest that researchers should make a distinction between *"level of aspiration"* and *"traditionality of aspiration"*. *It should be understood that it is possible for girls to aspire to professional jobs (i.e. high level) that are still traditionally female occupations'* (p280).

This became an important point for me because when I was talking with the teenage women I came away from our meetings feeling that they didn't have any aspirations as such. It was only on reading and re-reading the transcripts and reading Trotman Reid & Stenson Stephens' theory that it dawned on me that I was evaluating the teenage women's accounts according to my own thoughts on what constitute aspirations. This realisation, together with the distinction between 'level of

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aspiration' and 'traditionality of aspiration' enabled me to see aspirations from the teenage women's perspective, after all they are using phrases such as 'that's what I've always wanted to do' and 'that's what I've dreamed about all my life', which are phrases that fit my working definition of aspirations, that is, being things one most strives after. Whilst they may see their futures mainly in stereotypically female occupations, it is the **level** of aspiration that makes the difference because they are aspiring to an occupational level alien to any of their familial experience. Their mothers recognise this and support them in these aspirations, wanting their daughters to have a better life than they have had.

Bringing their mothers in at this point again emphasises the way in which maternal education and employment experience feeds into the teenage women's employment aspirations.

French (1990) articulates the view that well-educated parents recognise the importance of education for girls as a means of minimising problems they may experience when they have children. Similarly, Whitehead (1994) suggests that it is employed, career-oriented, middle-class mothers who inspire career aspirations in their daughters, and Croll & Moses (IR3) note that whilst there are exceptions, generally familial *'patterns of advantage and disadvantage associated with employment status and educational qualifications tend to be predictable across generations'*. However, from what the teenage women told me, I would argue that mothers who are working-class, who are perhaps not so well educated themselves also recognise the importance of education for girls and actively encourage and support their daughters towards educational achievement as a means of widening their life opportunities. These mothers are not indifferent to education; they are not representing marriage as a way out of material deprivation. These mothers are presenting themselves as negative role models to be avoided and stressing the importance of education as the most accessible way in which their daughters can lead more fulfilling adult lives than their own have been. From this perspective less-educated mothers have absorbed the achievement discourse and are projecting it onto their daughters, using their own experiences as a counter-model.

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As the teenage women aspire to having a career, or at least a good job and have maternal support for these aspirations, I was interested to find out what support and advice the school provides to help them make career-related decisions. Two aspects of the school experience seem particularly relevant – careers advice and work placements.

We began by talking about careers advice. Louise hadn't seen the careers adviser for a while, even though *"she's meant to come and see wer like, every so often, so ... And we get careers advice of wer child, off wer children! (laughs), off wer ma's and off other teachers as well"* (105-108). She feels that there's *"loads a people speaking to yer, 'Do this' and 'You should do this' and, well not exactly telling what to do, but giving wer advice"* (112-114). It's not clear whether Louise feels under pressure from conflicting sources or whether she appreciates all the advice she is getting.

Claire said that at her meeting the careers advisor didn't really talk about jobs as such, *"they talked just about, sort of like, university, college, training scheme, different things like that"* (377-378). Christina's experience was much the same, *"We discuss like, universities and colleges mostly"* (156). As well as university and college, Marie and Sarah's careers advisor gave them lists of modern apprenticeships they could do.

It's difficult to tell whether Samantha's career meeting was a positive or negative experience, *"she says to us, 'What do you wanna do in the future', and I says 'I've always wanted to work with children'. And then she had give us some advice saying well erm 'Are you hoping to stay on?' I'm going 'Yes, I want to definitely stay on'. She went 'If you can, try an ger a intermediate, do health and social care cause that means you can ger out an go on some trips like, to the nurseries and that'. An I says, 'Well, I'll try it. If not, I'll go, I'll stay until I do get an intermediate'. She went, 'Well, I'm happy in either way, if you do or don't cause then, you've known what you wanted for your future, and I hope it always stays wi yer'. I went, 'Don't worry, it will' (laughs)"* (480-491).

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Melanie and Mary think their careers meetings were very unhelpful. Melanie recalls seeing the careers advisor *"just after me GCSEs and they were asking us what I wanted to do. And I was like, saying what I was interested in an, I mean, all she done was, type on her computer basically and give yer a printout. She wasn't really listening; she was just like, 'Oh right, fine'. No. She never really give us any advice at all. I find them very pointless. I mean, I'm always hesitant, cause I think 'Oh, she's not really gonna help us'. Cause I come out more confused than I go in"* (473-485). Mary said, *"Like, when she asks you what you wanna do, you tell her and she, everything you say, they just try and talk you out of it. That's what they've always done with me"* (158-160).

In much the same way as the mature women, the careers advice that the teenage women have received seems to be of minimal interest and benefit to them. However, there is a difference of emphasis between the two groups with the teenage women being advised about further education and training rather than employment. This emphasis on further education and training is perhaps understandable given the level of qualifications and skills now needed in most jobs.

Perhaps one careers visit is not sufficient to provide pupils with the necessary information upon which to make informed choices. Alongside the question of the appropriate number of visits, Bowlby *et al* (1998) question just how effective any careers service can be if schools continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes. They note that *'Careers officers have argued that there is little chance of breaking sex segregation in training schemes as it's too late at 16'* (p232). By the time of this single visit most pupils have already made up their minds as to what they will do when they leave school.

The careers service itself is going through major changes and the new Connexions (2001) service may well address some of the weaknesses the teenage women encountered. It is proposed that Connexions staff will make repeated visits to pupils from Year 8, and as the system develops all pupils will be able to access the system online at any time. Through these various access points Connexions aim to provide a more uniform service than has been the case in the past.

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As well as careers advice, most pupils have a period of work experience arranged by the school. According to the teenage women, their work placement options were quite limited and included schools, hotels and offices. So, not only were they limited, they were gendered too. I asked about the kinds of work they had been doing at their placements and how they felt about it.

Claire and Sarah were in primary schools. Claire was *"just helping the children with their work, erm, going on break duty, helping them in their PE lessons, an just helping the teacher out as well"* (336-338). Sarah was *"Just erm, being a classroom assistant, working with all the children. Was good"* (231-232).

Whilst Claire and Sarah seemed to enjoy their placements in primary schools, Melanie did not enjoy her office experience, *"Filin, being a receptionist basically an, tea-maker. An I hated it. Hated every single minute of it. I really did"* (442-443). Christina was disappointed with her work experience because she thought she was going to a press office, *"cause I, like, told the teacher I wanted to be, like, journalist. And then, it was just totally rubbish (laughter). Just printin. It was like, you know like when you go to paper, it wasn't even a paper. It was just a photography place, and printin, and you just spent the whole time like, filin"* (345-352).

Whether they liked it or not, the teenage women did reflect on their experience and were able to point out some of the positive and negative aspects of work experience. Louise saw some of the positive aspects, *"it gives you like, an experience in every, and you pick up skills, different skills. So you can be like, Jack-of-all-trades, sort of thing. So when you get older and you go for a job, and you haven't actually done a big massive qualification, you've got little bits of knowledge of it, so"* (604-608). Conversely, Melanie mentioned some of the negative aspects. *"Was very boring, it wasn't very challenging. I got sick of filin. Er, to me, work experience isn't knowing how to make a cup of tea. Work experience, you wanna learn a bit about the world, a bit about the work. It's not making a cup of tea or, you know"* (447-450).

One of the problems seems to be a lack of agreement about the purpose of work experience. In Ahier *et al's* (2000) Cambridgeshire study, employers viewed work experience as a way of putting something back into the community. They did not

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consider it to have any practical benefit for themselves and it was not a vehicle for staff recruitment, other than perhaps for Saturday jobs. Conversely, the teachers and pupils saw it as a way to develop personal and social skills, experience the world of work and sample different types of jobs. Louise might agree that this had been achieved, but I don't think Melanie would. Ahier *et al* (2000) suggest that to be more effective, clearly stated learning outcomes should be part of all work experience. But this is problematic – for instance, who decides what these learning outcomes should be, who is going to observe and record achievement, what happens if a person does not achieve the stated outcomes, how much is it going to cost, etc? Although problematic, the development of learning outcomes could be a useful strategy, providing a valuable learning experience and something tangible that young people could present to a prospective employer.

Whilst we were talking about their work experiences, I asked them for their views about equal opportunities for women in the workplace. Naturally, given their limited experience their responses are, at best, speculative. Nevertheless, they do have strong views, and these are illustrative of the attitudes they will eventually take with them into the workplace.

Louise cited pay differentials as an example of inequality at work, *“men get paid more than women. I think that's the only thing. The main thing I can think of anyway (...) the places I've worked I've seen just as many women as I have men. But I think men get treated better, like, they don't try and boss them about as much and make them feel little”* (617-622).

Louise is quite right; many women do earn less than men. The EOC (1999) states that in 1998 women in manual employment earned 64% of the average weekly wage, and those in non-manual employment earned 65% of the average weekly wage. Greer (1999) maintains that not only are women paid less, *‘they are also disadvantaged in pensions, sickness benefits, conditions, in-service training and opportunities for promotion’* (p123).

Danielle raised the issue of inequality in male and female status at work. *“Like, shop work and everything, it's mostly women, but, like, the good jobs are mostly men. But*

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*they are starting to get women as well, but ... I'd say mostly men get better jobs"* (300-302).

How do you feel about this? I asked.

*"It's not right. ... You know, you hear men saying 'Oh, she's only a woman' and that, but ... they're just exactly the same. They should be able to do exactly what men can do (...) they're just thinking 'Oh, she's just a woman', but we're the same as them really. We should be allowed to do what they do, cause they can do what us do. So why shouldn't we be allowed to do like, do what they can do"* (306-315).

Danielle isn't totally pessimistic about women's employment status, she thinks there have been changes, *"there's more opportunities for women now because, like, women have spoke out really, and says 'We should be allowed to do this and that'. An erm, like you see women who are like lawyers and that now and, you just didn't see that ages ago, so, changed, ah ha"* (325-328).

So far, the teenage women have spoken about pay differentials and unequal status at work. Margaret then spotlighted the intersections of employment and motherhood. *"Erm, like, now, you can get crèches (...) they weren't available like, years ago. But, still the women that's leaving to look after the kids, which I don't think's right. Na, cause they get paid less, don't they? I think that's really, really wrong. Cause, if, I think I was watching it on the television, they done the same job. I can't remember what job it was, but the man was still getting more. And the woman was comin, I think the woman was comin out with betta results (...) But we, in a way, why, ah ha, we should be grateful, but not for the fact that we're getting it, cause we shoulda gor it in the first place"* (528-563).

Marie and Melanie also think that equality at work has not yet been achieved. In Marie's view *"there's like, not as many jobs for women as there is men. Like, there's still needs to be more, like, equal opportunities an stuff"* (414-416). Melanie asserts that a change in the law does not necessarily mean a change in practice and attitudes. *"Yes, we have a law, but not necessarily everyone abides by that (...) I don't think er, personally I don't think they get promotion. Because, yes, they may be good at their jobs, but they probably see them as, well, they're going to start a family shortly, or something, something that's going to tear them away from the office 24:7."*

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*And then they think, 'Well, we've got this man here, and he's happy and single. He's got no ties. He's more reliable, he's more'. So I, I think, on a whole they're gonna give it to the man, rather than the woman" (492-503).*

Indeed, as Griffin (1985) remarks, *'There is a widespread assumption that now Britain has legislation against race and sex discrimination, the golden age of equality has arrived'* (p190), but women's actual experiences show that this is often far from the case.

Melanie's view links with that of Osborne (1991) who makes the point that employers tend to assume that all women of child-bearing age will eventually have children, and therefore women are unreliable employees. Women do have children, but if women are unreliable employees as a consequence of being mothers, it is possible to argue that their unreliability is also attributable to employers' unwillingness to accommodate family life. As Webb (1991) remarks, significant changes in the employment position of women will not occur until employers rethink job requirements in ways that do not exclude competent women who also happen to be mothers.

In talking about equal opportunities in the workplace, the teenage women show an acute awareness of the barriers they are likely to face in their own working lives. Many of the teenage women seem to believe that employers continue to view a woman's first loyalty as being to her family; consequently promotion tends to go to men because they make more reliable employees. If this is so, then it presents a barrier to women's progress up a corporate ladder and adds a further conflictual layer to the teenage women's career aspirations.

Picking up the issue of pay differentials, Hatt (IR13) suggests that even if employment discrimination were eliminated, women's earnings would continue to be less than men's because women cluster in a narrower range of jobs, often part-time, where comparison with men's work is almost impossible. The main reason women are prevented from pursuing full-time jobs with career progression is domestic commitments, particularly childcare. Although the teenage women recognise these difficulties, they also sense a change. Danielle thinks that women are



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beginning to resist through a collective voice, speaking out and gaining ground with initiatives such as crèche's providing positive help for women who need childcare.

Reading these accounts again, I find the teenage women's phraseology intriguing. Danielle uses the word 'allowed' three times, Margaret uses the phrase 'should be grateful'. Claire, Sarah, and Christina, in talking about their work placements, all used the word 'just' to qualify the low status of what they were doing. Who should allow women widened opportunities? Who should women be grateful to? I suggest that underpinning this phraseology lie the deep roots of traditional feminine discourses wherein women are subservient and controlled, where men determine what is, is not appropriate for women to do.

Although the teenage women recognise the position they occupy and feel resentment of it, their comments also suggest that they recognise how very difficult it is to change these deep-rooted beliefs. They may feel they have more access to voice in the familial and educational spheres, they may have the language of resistance before them, but bringing about change in beliefs, in custom and practice is a difficult and long-term project.

Towards the end of this discussion, Christina introduced a completely different perspective. In her opinion the issue is not so much about the gendered nature of job opportunities, rather it is about the availability of **any** jobs of any type. She said that some people have *"got jobs and some have got careers, but erm, some are unemployed. A lot round here"* (314-315). I asked her if one's location makes a difference. *"Yeh. Like in the erm, like north-south. Like in London, always seems to be like, jobs and stuff. But up here, just seems to be like, little, rubbish jobs"* (319-324).

Christina's views may be the legacy of the unemployment and job closures of her parents' generation during the severe economic recession of the 1980s. As Ashton (1989) remarks, most of the jobs lost were in traditional manufacturing industries that tended to be concentrated in the North of England, whereas the new high-technology jobs were concentrated in the South East. As I mentioned in Chapter Nine, one consequence of this recession was a massive decline in the number of

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young people in full-time employment. The economic downturn and lack of youth jobs persisted into the early 1990s and Osgerby (1998) believes it will *'persist well into the twenty-first century'* (p158). It is possible that Christina believes this situation still continues and will affect her own life prospects.

The teenage women thus articulate some of the potential conflicts they may encounter in trying to realise their aspirations. They are aware of the discourse of widening opportunities; yet they are also aware of occupational barriers such as reduced youth employment opportunities, gendered employment practices, pay differentials and *'ideological beliefs about gender and domestic responsibilities'* (Irwin & Stewart:1993:177).

Irwin & Stewart (1993) conclude that unless men take more domestic and childcare responsibilities, unless childcare becomes more affordable and available, then women's options will continue to be limited. Archer (1985) sees these difficulties as being particular to girls, who continue to have to choose between career and family, or at best think about how they will balance the two. The girls in Archer's (1985) study felt that they were *'very much alone in their decision making about these potential priorities, that support systems are minimal, that they expect to do it all as wife, mother, and employee by themselves'* (310-11), whereas the boys expressed no such conflicts between career and family. McRobbie (1994) emphasises this point when she remarks that women have been *'unhinged'* from traditional gender positions *'while the gender and class identity of their male counterparts has remained more stable'* (p158), a situation that is likely to cause conflict.

I have already mentioned the disparity between female and male beliefs about role in Chapter Ten, it is a subject I want to raise again now because it is an issue of some concern to the teenage women and is likely to have huge impact on their aspirational fulfilment. Threads of traditional femininity, romance, marriage and motherhood permeate their thoughts, together with new discourses concerning independent, assertive, decision-making female constructions.

Louise thinks *"men just think women are their slaves. Like, if they say something, women have got to do it. But if the women say something, the men's like, 'That's*

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*your job', or 'Don't tell me what to do, I'm the boss', sort of thing. Not all men are like that, especially now they're not, so. But just women have just got to stand up and put their foot down and say 'look, I'm not having it, get out', sort of thing (...) But women are frightened. They'll think 'Well, eh, I love him, I don't wanna leave him' and, things like that. But I just think women are just ... they get trampled over. At least they did. They don't now ... as much"* (466-479).

Whereas Louise says that women **ought** to resist, Margaret says she **will** resist, that she won't put up with the subservient role. *"I've got friends, older friends, and they're under the thumb. They do everything that their boyfriend says, and like, it just wouldn't be me. Na, never ever (laughs). They take advantage, man, as soon as they know they've got you"* (371-375).

Jo is looking for middle ground because in her view women can't do everything on their own. Having said that, her views are not strictly traditional, she thinks that things have changed for women, largely as a result of the messages that other women and the media send out. *"Like, you don't have to be a housewife if you don't wanna do. There's plenty opportunities out there, things like that"* (397-399). In addition to role model and media messaging, Jo thinks that society generally has changed, *"It's much wider view now ... It's like, when you say the work you do, you don't think 'Oh, she should be in the house'"* (415-416).

On the other hand, Melanie doesn't think things have changed very much at all. *"It's not that far different, for some people. I mean, yes, we have progressed up the ladder in, we, we get, we have more rights. But, we're still not as equal to men. We haven't got as nearly as much power as men have ... Erm, well, like jobs. Erm, erm, career opportunities and, just, basic things. I mean, it is better, but, but like I say, we haven't got as nearly much power as we should have, like, compared to the men"* (348-379).

Considering the teenage women's view of male attitudes, I wondered what they want from a future partner. Equality is of primary importance and the teenage women gave me various descriptions of what partnership equality means to them.

Louise wants to be treated *“as equal as their mates and everything else, so. I don’t want, I don’t want anybody to say ‘I, I wear the trousers in this house’, sort of thing. Share responsibilities, and everything. And with the kids, if I have any, with the housework, with anything. And I think it’s berra that way, cause you don’t feel like ‘Oh, I’m sick’, and erm, you’ll just end up finishing and, things like that”* (520-525).

Melanie expects equality too. *“I mean, I, I’ll be finishing work and he’ll be finishing work, so I don’t expect to go in the house everyday and start a dinner. I’d like if he done it occasionally an I done it, an we like, took turns, basically. I mean, I don’t wanna wear the trousers, but I wanna have a leg (laughter). Basically, I wanna have something”* (272-278).

Danielle’s vision at first seems to be more traditional, but on closer inspection it isn’t. She laughed and said that she expects her partner to *“Have a really good job, earn millions a year. I hope (laughs). That’s, probably not gonna happen. Hmm. Just a good job to support the household and that”* (162-165).

Having said that, she also sees the role of provider as being partly her role as well as the man’s, *“Cause I don’t wanna be one of these women who just stay in everyday. I wanna be earn me own money and that”* (169-170). In terms of housework she wants a man who will *“Help, at least. Like, not make me do everything. Sometimes tidy up. Or even cook or something. Cause they’re both tired after a day at work so, they should help each other out, not let one person do all the things”* (178-185).

Marie wants a partner who will help with childcare, *“Like them to get, like sacrificing their work as well as me. So them can help look after the children as well”* (295-296). I asked her if she thought this was likely. *“Hmm. Erm, don’t know. Sometimes the men just like to, like stay at work and expect the women to raise them. Stay off work and look after the children”* (300-302).

Margaret took a firm stance, her partner **will** help out, *“I’d make them. (laughter). No, I, I think it’s half and half. Like, ‘if you do your share, I’ll do mine’”* (284-292). Like Margaret, Claire intends exerting pressure too, *“Well, I’d try to make him help out as much as he can. It should be equal. Should do the same things”* (176-177).

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And there's more pressure from Sarah, *"He'll probably say 'Oh, the woman has to go to, stay at home and he wants to go to work'. So he'll have to have the tea on the table for him coming in an, but, depends who the man is. I'd tell him where to go (laughs). Say it's up to me"* (145-152).

Jo is more optimistic, she thinks things have *"changed now from the olden days, hasn't it. Men never used to do anything, used to work and that was it. But it's changed now. Well, in my view it has. There's loadsa men help tidy up an that these days, help round the house"* (222-229). However, when I asked Christina and Mary if the lads they know are likely to share tasks there was a deep exhalation of breath and an emphatic *"NO"* (227).

The teenage women seem to be fully aware that their requirements of future partners are at odds with what their male peers want from a relationship, and that this is likely to cause conflict. But it also appears that they are little inclined to submit to a subservient position, they would rather tell him to get out. These teenage women do not appear to be afraid of going it alone.

In talking about expectations of future partners, we also touched on the subject of children. Although the teenage women are largely ambivalent about becoming mothers, there is an expectation that sooner, though preferably later, they will have children, and that this will materially affect their lives. However, of all their concerns and fears for the future, teenage pregnancy is the major area of concern and one that they spoke about at length.

Louise said that if she became pregnant she *"wouldn't keep it because, ... I don't know how I'm gonna feel in five years, ten years, I wanna make sure"* (534-536). She went on, *"There's loads a my friends been pregnant. I found out just yesterday about one of them. I was really, really shocked"* (540-542).

I asked her if having children prevents a woman doing what she wants to do. *"Definitely. Well it, it could. Well, actually, it does, it does. Because no matter what happens you've got that baby and that baby will come first. If you don't put it first, if*

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*you think clubbin is gonna be your first priority then, you're not really a good mother, I think"* (546-549).

The oscillation between 'could' and 'does' is indicative of the conflict the teenage women are experiencing between new and traditional motherhood discourses.

Margaret also has a friend who is a teenage mother, *"she's like, well she's my age, and she's got like a, I think he's 3 this year, and her, the, the da, ran, ran off. And now he's just wanting to come back into her, like, the kid, his life. And she's letting him as well, an I like, I would never stop the da seeing me kid, but erm, I just don't think he deserves it. I think he would have to like, and achieve it. Cause it's not right when you, if you fall pregnant, it's both the fault, not just one"* (296-303). I asked her what would happen if she found herself pregnant. *"Me mam doesn't believe in abortion, so even if I did fall pregnant, she wouldn't get rid it, but. It's, now, it depends where, like, you fall pregnant, you're in that position. But that, that bairn's not gonna have a life. Well, it'll have a life, but it's not gonna be as good as it coulda been"* (450-453).

In what she says, Margaret seems to be suggesting that some young women may not be allowed to make their own decisions if they became pregnant, that they are treated as irrational children. She also highlights the contradiction inherent in this situation in that the young woman is not adult enough to make a decision about her own body and pregnancy, but she is expected to be adult enough to shoulder the responsibility for the baby once the child is born.

Claire thinks that having children slows down what a woman can do, *"Cause they have to put their kids first, really, before them"* (216-216). Although she 'probably' wants a family, she'd *"still wanna try and gerra good job an everything at the same time. So it's just, when the right time, yeh"* (228-229). Claire is quite fatalistic about teenage pregnancy. *"Well, if, if it happens, there's nothing really you can do. You just have to try and look after the children and you need, your boyfriend has to stay. He has to get money for the kids. It's berra if you get an education as well, but that would be hard with, you know"* (280-283).

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Marie told me about a friend of hers who is a teenage mother and the effect being a mother has had on her life, *"she was 14 when she fell pregnant and she was 15 when she had it. So she's left school now. She's got a baby, so she's not finished school or nothing (...) and she'll, she'll probably just end up in a, if she gets a job, an she'll just end up in a job that's boring, just shop or something"* (195-203). However, with adequate support, Marie thinks it is possible to manage a career and family together, *"As long as you have like, childcare and stuff. And then, even if you take a like, a bit of time out of work when it's just still young, till it goes to school and everything"* (288-290).

Melanie believes that having a child does impact negatively on a career, *"once you seem to have a child, all opportunity, prospects, seem to go out the window. Er, cause you have to like, maybe cut your hours down so you'll be there to pick your child up an, you're not considered for erm, higher benefits, basically, like, in the job, industry. Well that's how I feel. You're not considered for promotion or anything. Cause they think, well, you're unreliable, you've got a child, so if that child's ill, you won't be able to make this board meeting etc. I do feel that"* (292-301).

So you think it's still the women's job to look after the children? I asked.

*"Yeh. I feel it is because erm, yes, the men help, like some men do. But, it seems to be the mother who's always there an, an cares for the child"* (306-312).

Sarah agreed, *"I think I don't wanna have children at this age because it ruins you life and, can't go an gerra job because they're too busy looking after the children and then they've got no qualifications cause them had to leave school, cause they were pregnant, so"* (288-291).

Do you think this is something boys have to think about? I asked.

*"No, because they just think 'Oh, she's pregnant. It's not my problem, it's her problem'"* (299-300).

The teenage women's views about motherhood, particularly single motherhood, are very pessimistic. It is the woman who has prime responsibility for childcare; it is the woman's career and life prospects that are irrevocably damaged. And yet, McRobbie (2000) argues that young motherhood has long been established working-class tradition. For many working-class young women, pregnancy is a decidedly better

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option than unemployment or low-paid part-time work and poverty. Indeed, being a mother is to acquire an accepted place in society, it is a sign of maturity, perhaps *'the only sign of maturity to which they could legitimately aspire'* (McRobbie:2000:163), particularly where qualifications are deemed unnecessary because the only available employment is low-paid, low-skilled and part-time. Although the teenage women in this study are working-class and live in an area of high unemployment, they do have career aspirations that they think would be blighted by motherhood.

Discussing the intersection of motherhood and employment, Melanie says that, fundamentally, ideas about women have to change. *"We're not just the home-makers. We have more to give. We're manager material, we're director material. We're, we're just as good as the men (...) We're still, they still see young girls having kids an, in the house an, you know. Because girls have to prove a point. We have to prove that we can do it. It's like a, it's a fight, everyday, to prove that we can, be tret just the same, basically (...) we have to show that we're better than, because the men just don't acknowledge wer, basically. I mean, we have to prove that we can get that, er, high, high-class job an, we have to prove all this all the time. We're not just provin it one day, we've got to prove it every day (...) It gets disheartening because you think 'Well, what's the point' "* (383-411).

What's the point for you? I asked.

*"Just to prove that we, as a whole, can do it. We can get where we wanna go. We can achieve wer goals"* (415-419).

I began this chapter by saying that for the teenage women, female role expectations are unclear, a lack of clarity that will have consequences for their adult lives. We discussed their options on leaving school and their aspirations/expectations concerning their future lives. Their aspirations have a strong educational/occupational centrality; none of them mentioned a domestic centrality as an immediate option. However, it would be erroneous to think that continuing education is a 'free' choice. Because of the contraction of the youth labour market in the 1980s and 1990s, together with changed skills required by new industries, continuing education has become the accepted post-school route for most young people. Although obtaining employment is more difficult for young people today



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than it was in my generation, a positive outcome of these structural changes is an unprecedented female participation in further/higher education.

As well as gaining qualifications, the teenage women aspire to careers or at least good jobs and although the occupations they aspire to are situated in stereotypical female occupations, I argue that these are atypical choices when set in the context of their familial – particularly maternal – experience. What makes them atypical is the **level** of aspiration. Most of the teenage women's mothers have low-skilled, part-time jobs whereas they aspire to being 'quite high up' in their jobs. Their mothers recognise this change in aspirational level and encourage their daughters' efforts towards achieving a life different to their own.

The teenage women talked about conflicts in the employment sphere. On the one hand they subscribe to the discourse of widening opportunities, on the other they recognise the inequalities inherent in traditional employment discourse. In this they show an understanding of the links between employment and motherhood, where employers regard a woman's first loyalty is to her family, with the result that men are promoted because they are considered to be more reliable employees. The teenage women are aware that these discourses have consequences for their career aspirations and believe that further change is required if the equality discourse is to have a significant relevance for them.

Whilst the teenage women think that more men involve themselves in domestic and childcare tasks than has been the case for previous generations of women, as far as they are concerned the balance is as yet far from equal and they are not prepared to carry the entire burden themselves in a partnership. The teenage women said nothing about romance and securing boyfriends. Indeed, when they did talk about boys there was scepticism and disdain in their tone of voice as well as in their words, so perhaps the teenage women I spoke with do not see having a boyfriend '*as a mark of adulthood*' (Griffin:1985:56). This reflects McRobbie's (1994) analysis of the '*Just Seventeen*' magazine, in which she finds that '*the girl is no longer the victim of romance. She is no longer a slave to love ... There is love and there is sex and there are boys, but the conventionally coded meta-narratives of romance ... have gone for good*' (p164).

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That there is love and sex and boys can lead to the key issue that the teenage women believe has the potential to adversely affect their life plans – pregnancy, and in particular lone teenage pregnancy. They believe that if they had a child then their first responsibility would be to the child, rather than to any career aspirations they may have. Far from voluntarily becoming single mothers as a means of obtaining state benefits and council housing, as popular constructions of lone parenthood would have society believe, for these teenage women, single parenthood is most definitely not a desirable option.

With their high hopes and their concerns, I said goodbye to Louise, Danielle, Margaret, Claire, Marie, Jo, Melanie, Sarah, Samantha, Christina and Mary, wishing them well as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood.

In the final chapter of the thesis I will reflect on the ways in which aspirational/expectational development is socially constructed, on whether there has been discursive stability/change across the time span of the two groups and on whether and in what ways things are different for girls today.

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## Chapter Twelve

### The Times They Are A Changing

*An explosion of meaning follows her speech, like a  
silent distant burst of fireworks on the night.*

(Drabble: The Gates of Ivory)

Through my employment and academic experiences I have found that many women of my generation – born in the 1950s – are apt to express the view that things are different for girls today. I started to wonder, what is meant by ‘things’, what do women aspire to and expect of their lives and how do they learn these ‘things’? Does this learning impact on their aspirations and expectations? I began to question whether the aspirations and expectations of girls today have changed from those held by women of my generation, if they haven’t – why not, and if they have, what are the changes and how have these change come about? In this study aspirations are those things that women strive for, most desire and dream about, and expectations are those things that women consider are most likely to happen in their lives.

In an attempt to answer these questions, working-class women born in the 1950s and 1980s from the North East of England have spoken at length about their lives and learning experiences. The designation of social class, timescale and geographical area, as well as gender, is significant because these features ‘*intersect with, cut across and give distinctive and material shape to what it means to be ... female*’ (McRobbie:2000:198).

Social class is important because the conditions of life for working-class women with regard to production, consumption, lifestyle, patterns of residence, education and employment experiences (Bradley:1996) have always been different to those of middle-class women. Differences exist not only **between** social classes, but also **within** the working-class itself (Skeggs:2001). Within-class differences carry various emotive and evaluative labels, for example there are respectable and unrespectable working people, there are the deserving and the undeserving poor, concepts that have Victorian roots relating to economic processes and morality. Whatever label one

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uses, working-class people have been theorised, or pathologised, as different, as Other, to the middle-class standard.

Geographical area is important because the North East of England had traditionally been perceived as a working-class region whose socio-economic conditions are materially different, more impoverished than, some other British regions. In this respect social class and geographical area intersect with gender to impact on women's aspirational/expectational development. Interestingly, Munt (2000) suggests that *'Aspiration, in class terms, is largely concerned with escape, rather than the reconstruction of available icons'* (p8).

As well as social class, the timescale of the study, 1950 – 2000, is important, firstly because the period is of sufficient length to make any similarities/differences between the two groups visible. Secondly and more significantly, the timescale is important because it is the location of a major social discontinuity that had national and global implications. In 1989, the Berlin Wall was dismantled, an act that has come to symbolise the end of communism. Writers such as Giddens (1991 & 1994) and Beck (1994) suggest that this act symbolises a break, or discontinuity, in the social order resulting in a split between a traditional social order and a post-traditional social order. From this perspective, taking 1989 as the pivotal point, the mature women are located in a traditional social order and the teenage women are located in a post-traditional social order.

Bringing social class, geographical area and timescale together, I have attempted to explore women's aspirational/expectational development from a social constructionist perspective. This has entailed an examination of the discourses that impact on aspirational/expectational constructions. For Foucault (1972), to explore discourse is to explore a whole domain of institutions, economic processes and social relations. It is these that facilitate the articulation of the concept 'female aspirations/expectations'. Not only do they give voice to the concept, they also actively produce and reproduce it. The institutions, economic processes and social relations included in this discursive domain include femininity, family, education, employment, marriage and motherhood.

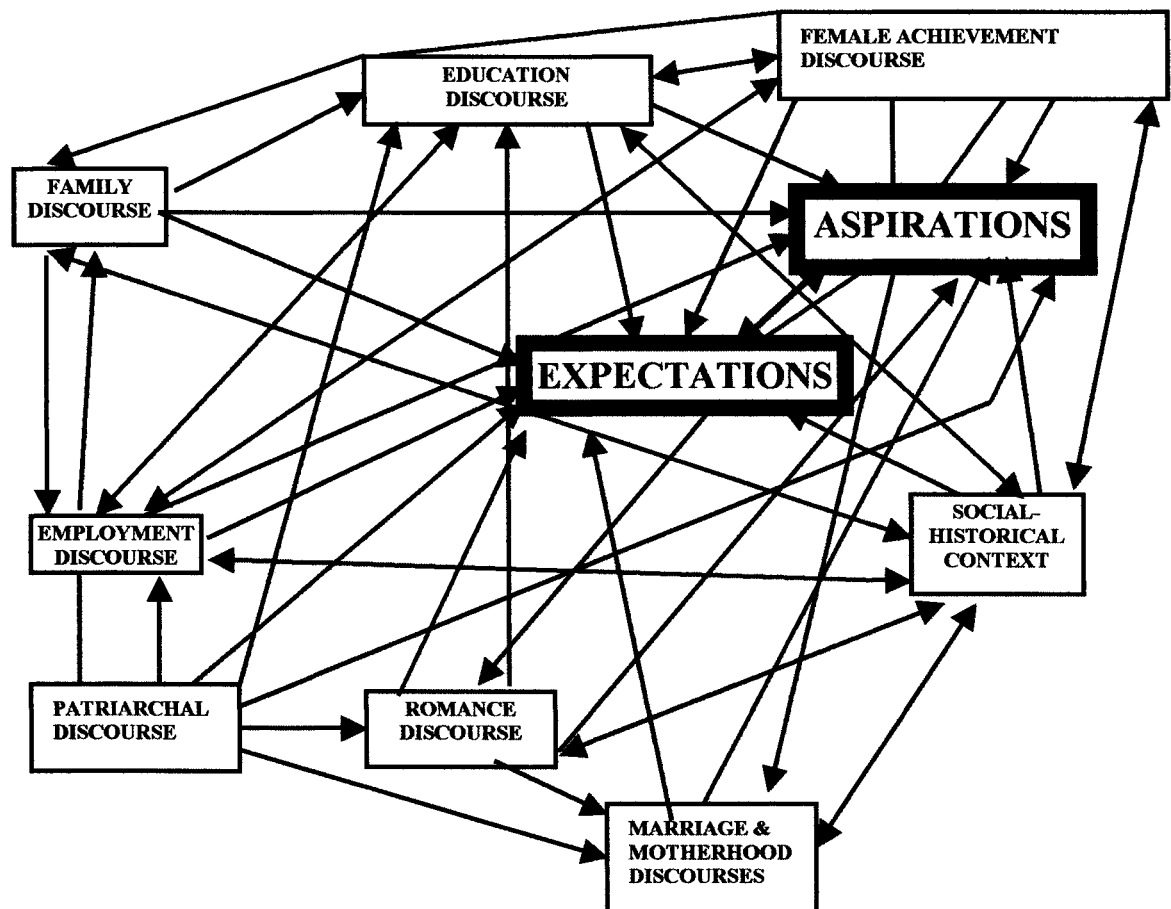
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Whilst there are similarities in the experiences of the two groups, there are also differences. In recounting their learning experiences these mature and teenage women demonstrate an awareness of the many contradictions and choices that impact on their lives, and of having to '*actively struggle to come to terms with, or to transcend, the conflicts involved in being female*' (Anyon:1983:21).

At the point of completing their secondary education, few of the mature women had specific aspirations, indeed, most of them hadn't thought seriously about their future at all. The general expectation was that they would have a job for a short time, and then marry and have children. Although many of these women did not aspire to become wives and mothers, they expected that this was how their adult lives would unfold.

By comparison, all but one of the teenage women aspire to be career women – or at the very least to have good jobs. Not only do they *aspire* to careers, they *expect* to have careers. For these teenage women, the traditional wife and mother role does not feature very strongly in their current consciousness.

So, how have these aspirations and expectations been constructed and what has brought about this apparent change? Fig 4 below illustrates the complex flow of discursive influences on aspirational/expectational development.



**Fig 4: Discourses Influencing Aspirational/Expectational Development**

As the model illustrates, the complexity of the interactions impacting on aspirational/expectational development makes it impossible to determine precise causal links between particular discursive practices and stability/change, therefore, I have tried to tease out influential discourses and to provide examples of ways in which the mature and teenage women have accommodated or resisted the discourses, thereby flagging up possible indicators of stability and change.

Why was it that the mature women had few aspirations? Why did they expect to be wives and mothers, even though they didn't necessarily want to be? The simple answer would be to say that this is what women did. But of course, the answer is far from being this simple. And if being a wife and mother is what women do, why is it that the teenage women have high career aspirations and a low domestic centrality?

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When the mature women were growing up, women were expected to be submissive and to be dependent upon the protection of a man, usually a father and then a husband. A woman's natural destiny was to become a wife and mother, and to commit herself full time to caring for her husband and children, it was in this way that she would achieve personal fulfilment. The consequence of this dependency was that a woman maintained a childlike persona all her life.

Being a wife and mother did not require girls to be highly educated; it was considered enough that they knew the basic domestic subjects that would enable them to run well-maintained homes. Curriculum choices were often limited to domestic subjects; teachers actively discouraged girls from pursuing academic achievement, and parents put pressure on daughters to leave school, gain employment and make a financial contribution to the family before they left to get married. Due to a woman's expected domestic role, academic success could be considered detrimental as it would probably reduce her chances of finding a husband. Just as education was not important for girls, neither was employment. For a woman to have employment aspirations was construed as undermining the male breadwinner role. Employers reinforced this discourse in that they were reluctant to employ women because in their view, **all** women aspired to marriage and motherhood, and as their first loyalty and responsibility would then be to husbands and children, women made unreliable employees.

This is the traditional construction of femininity, and it is the backdrop against which the mature women were born. They learned that domestic and childcare work was women's work and that all female members of the household were expected to do their share, but they did not find the fulfilment they had been led to expect in these tasks. On the contrary, they resented the demarcation between female compulsion and male exemption. However, whilst they resented it they had little or no power to resist, they had no access to voice with which to express their feelings because girls of this generation were expected to obey their parents.

In these families, males and females do not interact from positions of equality; therefore traditional feminine, wife and motherhood discourses are not facilitative or

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liberatory for women, they do not enable women to choose between alternative life constructions.

Thus in the home and at school, these mature women were silent and invisible; they had limited voice or choice in matters that concerned them. Does this mean that they submissively accepted this subservient positioning? On the whole, as young girls most of them do appear to have accommodated the traditional discourses, even though they may have done so with resentment.

But there are exceptions. Jane and Tracy were not expected to do housework. Jane's mother was determined that her daughter's childhood would not be lost to housework as her own had been. In this sense Jane's mother is acting as a change agent in both attitude and practice, breaking the cycle of domestic servitude usually expected of daughters at this time. Tracy's mother did not expect her to do housework because Tracy was clever, because she was doing her schoolwork. Here, Tracy's mother is resisting both domestic and education discourses in her interactions with her daughter. Tracy thereby learned that education has value, and she also learned to utilise education for her own purposes. So in Jane and Tracy's cases, alternative constructions were more of their mothers' making than their own. Nevertheless, they are alternatives to traditional female constructions.

Liz and Elizabeth were personally active agents; they resisted traditional education practice through the display of what were considered to be male behaviours such as being academically competitive and being disruptive in class to have their voices heard. Liz and Elizabeth both spoke about the cost of their resistance. Neither had many friends among their peers, Liz was thought odd and Elizabeth was castigated as a teacher's pet.

Thus, Jane and Tracy and their mothers, and Liz and Elizabeth illustrate the point that discourses are not static, that individuals can and do act agentically and bring about change, even though to do so is often done at personal cost. In doing so they are shaping alternative constructions that the next generation of girls has access to.



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But individuals do not operate in an isolated micro-social context; if they did then alternative constructions would disappear into the ether along with the individuals themselves. One also needs to take into account macro-social, structural changes. This can be problematic as it's almost impossible to determine whether structural changes occur as a result of the interaction of individuals, or whether individuals take up alternative constructions as a result of structural changes.

Whatever the answer to this conundrum, the 1960s and 70s were decades of massive social change, for example, divorce and abortion law reform, the introduction of the contraceptive pill and changes in family structure. In addition, many women, with and without children, did work outside the home, consequently the full-time mother construction was blurring round the edges.

The introduction of the contraceptive pill, – theoretically at least – afforded women a reliable means of controlling their own fertility, it reduced the fear of unwanted pregnancy, it meant that they could engage in sexual relationships without the compulsion to marriage, as a result of which one saw the development of new lifestyle choices such as 'free love', cohabitation and partnerships. Thus, effective contraception meant that these mature women had access to a construction of female sexuality that had not been available to their mothers, one that gave them at least the possibility of taking control of this aspect of their lives.

In addition, divorce and abortion law reform meant that women were no longer forced to continue with an unwanted pregnancy and endure the social stigma that attached to it; neither did they have to put up with an intolerable marriage. Many women took advantage of the divorce laws, as evidenced by the mature women in this study, the majority of whom have divorced.

The mature women raised an interesting issue about the developmental effects of the divorce process. They say that divorce meant they had to grow up. That is, although transforming from a childhood persona to an adult persona was a painful process, they view it as positive in terms of their own psychological development. No longer are they submissive and controlled by others, they make their own decisions and stand up for themselves, and as such provide positive role models for the next

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generation of women. Through their practice they are showing that a woman can head her own household and raise a family on her own. This is a point not lost on Janet who thinks that her generation were piggies in the middle, that they form a link between the traditional lifestyle of their mothers and the diverse lifestyle choices on offer to today's girls.

Turning to the teenage women, they are located in a post-traditional social order. The social changes taking place in Western society are epochal and the consequences are that the old, traditional ideas and responses no longer have validity, indeed they are *'in the process of falling apart'* (Beck:2000:24). Take, for example, the traditional idea of the male breadwinner, this model has been associated with traditional beliefs regarding gender relations and the *'proper' roles (and jobs) for men and women'* (Crompton:2002:540). This model is now being replaced by a fluid and transient work model and changing gender roles and it is unlikely that the breadwinner model will ever be ascendant again. One of the principle features of this change is increased female employment and the economic independence that goes with it. Beck (2000) remarks that *'women are the vanguard force of change in the new economy'* (p759), change in this view resides in the fact that female economic independence challenges the primacy of the male breadwinner, in the fact that women's economic activities can no longer be ignored, and that young women are now *'one of the stakes upon which the future depends'* (McRobbie:2000:201).

But there is more to this than solely changes in economic processes. There are also social consequences to these changes that impact on gender norms, relations in marriage and the family, the sexual division of labour, the fragmentation of social bonds and the exercise of power.

What this implies is that the post-traditional social order offers young women choices and the ability to make choices confers power. In Giddens' (1991) view, in *'modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance'* (p5). Instead of the relatively set path of traditional femininity that was handed down to the mature women, the teenage women have a multiplicity of lifestyles to choose from. However, choice can be problematic because as old forms are falling apart, young women have very little help or guidance as to which options should be

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selected. The concept of 'lifestyle' isn't simply about soft furnishings and cosmetics, it is about how one chooses to live one's life, it is about access to '*forms of self-actualisation and empowerment*' (Giddens:1991:6), lifestyle is not handed down in the way that traditional femininity was. Lifestyles, eg career woman, feminist, vegetarian, etc, are adopted and give material form to one's self identity. A lifestyle, in this sense, is a '*cluster of habits and orientations*' (ibid:82) that provide a certain unity to one's choices and constructions of self.

However, not everyone has access to all the possible choices, neither do people always consciously choose from a position of full knowledge and full understanding of all the options available. For all that social class has currently lost much of its importance in sociological debate, this does not mean that class is no longer a divisive strategy in post-traditional society. There can be no doubt that material, economic, social and psychological life chances continue to impact on lifestyle choices. Not only that, but Giddens (1991) suggests that the post-traditional social order actually '*produces difference, exclusion and marginalisation. Holding out the possibility of emancipation, modern institutions at the same time create mechanisms of suppression, rather than actualisation, of self*' (p6).

Perhaps one example of exclusion and marginalisation is to be found in current policies of educational expansion and inclusiveness, policies that purport to encourage more working-class people into higher education. At the same time the financial costs of continuing education are increasing, a factor that excludes many working-class people from higher education, and working-class women in particular given current pay differentials.

Thus, for the teenage women there is – potentially – the possibility of a multiplicity of lifestyle choices. Girls are no longer constrained by a domestic centrality, they recognise and position themselves within a female achievement discourse and aspire to careers or good jobs. Indeed, they expect to work for most of their adult lives, which was not the case with the mature women.

As the teenage women reflect on the lives of previous generations of women, there is a suggestion that life used to be more straightforward for women than it is now,

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school, a short period of work and then wife and motherhood, women used to know what was expected of them. But it's only a slight suggestion. On the negative side they think that men exercised power over women in the domestic and the employment spheres, that women didn't have a voice in what happened in their lives. In terms of their own lives, they think that things have changed, that they do have access to voice, that they do have choices.

What is the basis for these perceptions of change? To begin with, the teenage women have not experienced a domestic apprenticeship to the same extent that the mature women did. They might help out sometimes, but – like the mature women – they don't like doing domestic work and childcare and – unlike the mature women – they are prepared to make their feelings known, they resist vocally and in practice. These teenage women have much more access to voice about what they will/won't do than the mature women had. Whereas the mature women seethed with resentment, the teenage women are assertive and carry out their resolve through their own resistant actions; they do not appear to be submissive, silent, invisible females.

This resistance to domestic work and childcare means that the full-time mother construction is being dismantled and, as governments and writers through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s have found out, it is proving extremely difficult to revert to the discourse of full-time domesticity, though some have made the attempt.

Tooley (2002), for example, claims that modern education and equality discourses are pushing girls along an academic achievement and career trajectory when what most of them silently aspire to is traditional wife and motherhood. He christens this coercion the '*Bridget Jones Syndrome*' (p2) or the twenty-first century problem that has no name. Doyle (2001) argues that girls can resist this educational-career coercion by surrendering to the male authority of a husband; through surrender a woman can have the fulfilled marriage she has '*always dreamed of*' (p14). The teenage women in this study are not dreaming of marriage.

Publications of this nature can be seen as a continuation of the backlash against feminism and women's recent gains. But the situation is more complicated than this, it is also about increasing concern regarding male educational underachievement,

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changes in employment patterns, lone woman households, and even the diminishing necessity for the physical presence of a man at conception. In other words, the underlying concern in the 'traditional values' backlash is with perceptions of diminishing male status and power, a diminution that has consequences for the organisation – or disintegration – of society as we know it. As Beck (1994) notes, whilst female employment appears to be welcomed by all political parties, it is also blamed for '*an upheaval in the ... conventional occupational, political and private order of things*' (p4).

The teenage women have a heightened awareness of the importance of education for themselves. They know they need good qualifications if they are to get good jobs or careers, which is what most of them both aspire to and expect. This understanding is reinforced by a female achievement discourse that positions girls as academic achievers, university students and career women. Although Walkerdine *et al* (2001) do acknowledge that educational change has taken place insofar as more women are going to university than ever before, they also think that this female achievement discourse should be treated with caution, because in reality not **all** women are achieving academically, particularly not working-class girls.

Nevertheless, in a departure from previous generations, the teenage women's mothers are also stressing the importance of educational achievement. These mothers seem to be buying into the female achievement discourse and directing it to their daughters, often by presenting themselves as negative role models and suggesting that the pauperism of their lives is the result of their own poor educational outcomes.

This is an interesting finding in that, generally speaking, previous research suggests that it is employed, career-oriented, middle-class mothers who inspire career aspirations in their daughters (see Furlong:1986, Clausen:1991, Paludi:1992, Goldberg *et al*:1996 in Chapter 6 and French:1990, Whitehead:1994, Croll & Moses:IR3 in Chapter Eleven). However, from what these teenage women say, working-class mothers who have limited education, are employed in part-time, low-paid, low-status jobs are also instilling career aspirations in their daughters.

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Is this emerging female achievement discourse facilitative and liberatory for the teenage women? On the face of it, it would appear to be. It increases their self-confidence and motivates them to develop aspirations. They understand that education is the route to career development and that the consequences of early leaving are negative in terms of careers. Hall (2001) maintains that '*knowledge [is] always a form of power ... [that knowledge] has the power to make itself true*' (p76). Does this mean that the teenage women, having knowledge of female achievement and career opportunities, have the power to make their aspirations come true? McRobbie (2000) has proposed that in Britain, young women's identities have become '*unfixed from what traditionally it meant to be a ... woman*' (p201), but by comparison, the lives of men are still rooted in tradition, a point the teenage women themselves noted in their accounts. It is perhaps the conflict between male and female views concerning role that will prove to be the biggest barrier that these teenage women have to contend with as they attempt to fulfil their aspirations.

That the female achievement discourse may not be liberatory can be examined from a number of perspectives. Firstly, the way in which education intersects with employment means that many women will find that they do not enter the workforce as equal partners with men regardless of their qualifications, for example in terms of pay, training and promotion.

Secondly, political initiatives and educational policy combine to promote an expansion of further/higher education in a discourse of 'inclusiveness'. People from all social classes, ethnicities, abilities etc, are being encouraged to participate in lifelong learning, for the good of the nation as much as for their personal and professional development.

Looked at from a working-class female perspective, and as I have previously mentioned, how can this educational expansionist discourse be inclusive when the introduction of student loans and university top-up fees has a negative effect on working-class students' higher education aspirations generally, and working-class women's in particular. The *Times Higher Education Supplement* (14.3.03) reports that the imbalance in gender earnings causes many women to turn away from higher education. Whereas a man will repay his student loans within approximately 23

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years, because of pay differentials *'the average female graduate will never be able to repay her student debt unless she is given external support'* One would have thought this would be a vital consideration in any higher education plans a woman may have. But that's my construction of these issues; none of the teenage women mentioned financial barriers in relation to higher education, although they did mention pay differentials in employment.

Thus on the face of it, it would seem that the teenage women foresee widened opportunities and very few barriers to advancement. But like much else in their lives that they spoke about, they are not blind to inherent conflicts.

Whilst they believe that employment opportunities have widened for women generally, they also know that the majority of women do not have access to equal employment status and pay, that in the employment sphere equality may be paid no more than lip service. If they are right, then employment discrimination could prove to be a barrier to the fulfilment of their career aspirations. Neither are the teenage women naïve. Christina made the link between gendered employment opportunities, social class and geographical area. She made the point that aspirations may be unrealistic in an area of high unemployment and in these circumstances one may have to accept any employment one can get.

Neither are they naïve about the type of employment sectors they are likely to work in. Most of their career aspirations are located in traditionally female employment sectors. However, although the careers they envisage are located in **traditional** female employment sectors, I have argued that their aspirations are atypical because of the **level** of their aspirations. The teenage women are striving to reach higher occupational levels than any members of their families – and it is this that makes their aspirations atypical in familial, education, gender and employment terms.

In this post-traditional social order, traditional female identities may be becoming unfixed, female employment may have become the norm, but these teenage women are also aware that female employment and particularly maternal employment remains controversial. As Maushart (1999) remarks, the 'right' of mothers to engage in paid employment has always been subjected to cultural inspection, and still is. 'A

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*woman who hires a nanny to look after her young child while she works outside the home for pay may no longer be a statistical anomaly. Yet in many ways she remains a sexual suspect – one whose status as either responsible mother or responsible professional is at best probationary and provisional’ (p172).*

By way of illustration, in 1997, Nicola Horlick – fund manager for Morgan Grenfell (Buxton:1998) – came to represent all aspects of the debate. Here was a highly successful career woman and mother of five children. As her employment actions hit the headlines the debate honed in on the question of whether a woman could reach the pinnacle of her profession – and a very male-oriented profession at that – and still be a good mother. *‘For some Horlick was a heroine, but for many she was the epitome of the hardened and irresponsible working mother’* (Buxton:1998:4).

The teenage women express the belief that if they became mothers then the motherhood role would have to take priority, that any career aspirations they may have had would – at best be put on hold until their children were older – or more likely, abandoned altogether. Their views show how the traditional discourses of femininity, motherhood and employment continue to emphasise that a woman’s, or at least a mother’s, place is in the home.

This distinction between women and mothers is also apparent in the teenage women’s perceptions of who has responsibility for domestic work. Whereas the mature women learned that domestic work and childcare were women’s work and all the females in the household were expected to contribute, the teenage women appear to be making a distinction between ‘mother’s’ work and ‘women’s’ work. From the teenage women’s perspective it is not a foregone conclusion that all the females in the household will contribute to domestic work. Even where mothers are employed outside the home there is no general expectation that daughters will involve themselves in these tasks. This distinction between women and mothers occurs regularly in the teenage women’s accounts and as such impacts on their perceptions of self and the way in which their own adult futures will be constructed.

The teenage women’s views about their own future partners are far from traditional. It is not a foregone conclusion that they will be wives, instead they may choose to be



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cohabiting partners or remain single. But as wives or partners, they are not prepared to tolerate a subservient role. As Melanie says, she doesn't necessarily want to wear the trousers, but she does want a leg. The teenage women say they won't let a man take advantage of them, they expect him to share domestic and childcare responsibilities, and if he doesn't, they have the option of getting rid of him. From this perspective, men are not deemed necessary to a woman's verification of self; it is as though men are seen as a disposable commodity. It is likely that the teenage women have internalised this construction from magazines such as *'Just Seventeen'* in an analysis of which McRobbie (1994) suggests that girls are *'no longer the victim of romance'* (p164) and from the fact that most of them live in lone mother households. They have first hand experience of women managing a home and family on their own. Rather than falling apart without a man, their mothers have shown that women can successfully manage their own affairs.

This is not to suggest that the teenage women necessarily aspire to go it alone, most of them want a partner, but they insist on equality with a partner, which may be problematic as they do not feel that this is what their male contemporaries are looking for. It is the teenage women's view that men continue to advocate traditional roles in which it is the woman's responsibility to take care of domestic matters and to rear children, whether she works or not.

Of all the issues the teenage women raised in relation to their future lives, that of motherhood is critical, for them the whole concept of aspirational/expectational development centres on motherhood, everything else is peripheral to motherhood. Their views are echoed by Maushart (1999) who maintains that as the *'gaps in "equal opportunity" between males and females continue slowly to close, a more subtle fault line has emerged, dividing mothers from all others'* (p178).

Maushart is not arguing that motherhood cancels the educational and economic gains made by women, rather that it will *'narrow and distort them in significant, uncomfortable, and utterly unanticipated ways'* (p178), so much so that against an equality discourse of increased opportunities, many women, on becoming mothers, will feel cheated. So again, the female achievement discourse may not be liberatory once it intersects with motherhood.

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Over and over again the teenage women revert to the subject of motherhood, and in particular their worries concerning teenage pregnancy. Unlike the mature women who were resigned to marriage and motherhood, the teenage women see pregnancy and children in any circumstances as negative factors, but consider the situation to be far worse for single, teenage mothers.

For all their access to voice, their assertiveness and expectations of equal partnerships, for all their educational achievement and career aspirations, when it comes to motherhood the teenage women are, to a large extent, stuck in a traditional motherhood time-warp. Whilst they do not *expect* their lives to revolve around wife and mother roles, they are convinced that if they become pregnant then the motherhood role – though not necessarily the wife or partner role – is their responsibility, is all they have to look forward to, and a very pessimistic projection this is for them. And given their perceptions of their male peers' attitudes, perhaps they are right to be pessimistic.

But I don't want to end on a pessimistic note. Whilst some things remain resistant to change, in particular the motherhood role, the study shows that there is much to celebrate in the changed female constructions that have developed over the last 50 years, much to provide an insight into the lives of women at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The mature women are of a generation that set these changes in motion. Although a painful process, many of them took advantage of the reformed divorce laws. During and after divorce they had to 'grow up', that is they had to develop from a child persona to an adult persona. By doing so they have become role models for alternative constructions of femininity, demonstrating that women are capable of economic independence and do have the ability to manage their own households. Through this process they have had to overcome the 'silence' of their youth, they have had to develop a voice by which to be heard.

Access to voice becomes highly visible in the teenage women's accounts. The teenage women have much more access to voice than the mature women did, they have the confidence to exercise voice in the domestic and educational spheres,

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saying and practicing what they will/won't do. As yet they can only speculate on how they will act in the employment and partnership spheres, but they do believe that male peers and employers continue to hold traditional role attitudes which could become a source of conflict.

The teenage women make a distinction between women and mothers. Whereas the mature women learned that domestic work was female work, the teenage women view domestic work as mothers' work, and for them there is much less expectation that they should contribute. Indeed, the teenage women actively resist domestic work and their mothers do not demand compliance, thus breaking the cycle of domestic servitude that was generally the lot of women in previous generations.

The teenage women's distinction between women and mothers is reinforced by the persistence of the traditional motherhood discourse, a discourse that they are just as compelled by as were the mature women. Although they do not aspire to motherhood, they say that if they were to become mothers, then their career aspirations would, at best be put on hold, or more likely be abandoned altogether. They view childcare as principally the mother's responsibility in the same way that the mature women did. But perhaps the main point to draw out of this is the feeling of the two groups regarding motherhood.

Whilst many of the mature women didn't aspire to motherhood, the majority expected that they would become mothers and were resigned to this eventuality as being their natural role in life. Whilst many of the teenage women also express some sense of inevitability, they also feel very strongly that motherhood prevents a woman achieving her goals in life. They are pessimistic about motherhood because they think that changes in the division of domestic labour are as yet marginal. Their own male peers continue to express traditional sex role attitudes which suggests that the women will have to carry the main domestic and childcare workload if they become mothers, regardless of whether they work outside the home or not. The majority of the teenage women have friends who are mothers and they have seen for themselves the effects of disrupted education and the abandonment of career aspirations, of how motherhood takes over the whole of a woman's life, of how many fathers abdicate responsibility and the woman is left on her own to raise the child.

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The impact of motherhood on a woman's life trajectory is a major issue for these teenage women because the majority of them do have career aspirations. They position themselves within an emerging female achievement discourse which tells them that women can be whatever they want to be. Their mothers actively encourage them to do well at school as a means of having careers and better lives than they had. In fact, these mothers are positioning themselves as negative role models, as the personification of a lifestyle to be avoided.

This is an interesting finding because much previous research has suggested that it is middle-class, employed mothers who support and encourage their daughters' career aspirations, not working-class mothers. The mature women received limited career encouragement. For them education was not considered important for girls, and many of their parents pressured them to leave school, get a job and contribute to the family finances. However, as far as the teenage women are concerned, this study shows that working-class, less-educated, low-paid, low-skilled mothers are actively engaging with the female achievement discourse by encouraging their daughters' education and career aspirations as a means to a better lifestyle than they have had. In no way are the teenage women's mothers suggesting that marriage and dependency on a man are a means to self-fulfilment or a better lifestyle.

It could be said that these teenage women's career aspirations are not aspirations at all because they are situated in traditional female employment sectors, e.g. teaching, childcare, and office work. However, I have argued that these do represent aspirations because the level of education and employment the teenage women envisage for themselves is higher than any of their family experience.

If discourses do produce that of which they speak, perhaps there is hope that these teenage women will achieve their aspirations. As McRobbie (2000) notes, women's lives have become detraditionalised. Gone is the *'kind of fatalism that used to exist, that women's lives would follow a predictable path, that this must inevitably evolve round husbands and children, and that women must subordinate themselves to fulfilling this role'* (p210). In the post-traditional world the teenage women live in there is a multiplicity of choices. The question is, to what extent will these teenage women be able to take advantage of the choices that are on offer?

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Listening to these mature and teenage women's accounts, and examining my own account, has enabled me to understand their lives better, and my own. Not realising the full extent of the subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – discourses that underpin women's aspirational/expectational development, I have found it uncomfortable to reflect on my own life from a constructionist perspective. I have to acknowledge that I have been hoodwinked into believing that I have made my own decisions in life, and only now discover that in many instances I didn't, and often still don't. I have been forced to recognise that active resistance – even if perceived to be possible – is often a painful process. This realisation really should not have come as such a surprise when I know that women have been, and still are, abused for disobeying fathers, husbands and partners, why else do we need refuges, when I know that women have been, and still are, paid less than men for equivalent work, to give but two examples. Nevertheless, resistance, though painful, can have positive outcomes in terms of personal growth.

As to whether things are different for girls today, there is no definitive answer, no *'single, Archimedean standpoint from which to construct a final, true theory of everything'*, as Shotter (1988) puts it. Although female constructions do show evidence of change, some of the traditional discourses such as that of motherhood remain a potent force and women are tentatively navigating their way among myriad possibilities. As Rowbotham (1999) remarks, *'A combination of factors has impinged on women's lives and the impact has been, not surprisingly, mixed. It is as blinkered to select from these only signs of unqualified improvement as it is to deny that they have raised exciting possibilities'* (p582).

These teenage women are exploring different strategies in order to find a balance between traditional and emerging constructions for their own lives. In doing so they will have to face conflict, but they may also experience exciting possibilities. In this sense they are change agents and their changed behaviour will become part of theirs and other women's lived experience, challenging taken-for-granted knowledge, just as the mature women have been change agents for the following generations, and continue to be in their adult lives.

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One of the possibilities that I would find exciting as a researcher would be to travel with a group of young women over a number of years after they leave school, to observe and record how their aspirations and expectations are played out in practice. I think this would be a valuable research journey because it would facilitate contemporary comment on the barriers and supports that young women encounter in their attempts to realise their aspirations, and the ways in which they accommodate or resist the discourses. Such further work would also be valuable because this oral history of female aspirational/expectational development has no conclusion; it is an ever-shifting, ongoing story.

From the perspective of these mature and teenage women, an explosion of meaning has followed their speech, and for the teenage women fireworks are bursting on the night, but no longer so distant, no longer so silent.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **SURVEY – Participants and analysis of survey data**

#### **Survey**

The purpose of the survey was to establish broad issues and questions that would inform a second phase of interviews and ground my own experiences and anecdotal evidence in actual data, in other words, to gain a 'feel' for the substantive focus of women's aspirational/expectational development. Firstly I will say something about the survey participants, then move on to the survey design, its issue and return, and then the analysis and presentation of the survey data, concluding with issues that will inform the interviews.

#### **Participants**

The mature women were located at a community education establishment that provides personal development and vocational skills training courses. Students of diverse ages and backgrounds are recruited from the Tyne and Wear area.

The teenage women were located in two comprehensive schools. Both schools, Rhenek and Tiefoe High Schools, are large, mixed (in terms of ability, gender and ethnicity) comprehensives, taking pupils from 13 – 18 years of age.

At the time of the survey, Rhenek's catchment area was undergoing rapid change with private housing and amenity developments coexisting alongside existing areas of high social deprivation, and a high incidence of one-parent families. Although the school had more pupils of moderate and limited ability, it had fewer pupils with special educational needs than the national average<sup>1</sup>.

Tiefoe High School is located in a built up area and also accommodates all levels of ability, at the time of the survey its average pupil attainment was in-line with national norms. Tiefoe's special educational needs population was also lower than the national average, and the incidence of single-parent families was lower than the city average.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of academic/vocational attainment, Rhenek data suggest that girls have a slight advantage over boys in GCSE and A/AS levels and slightly more girls than

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<sup>1</sup> Information on the schools is taken from School Literature, Ofsted Reports and Ward Profiles

<sup>2</sup> Information on the schools is taken from School Literature, Ofsted Reports and Ward Profiles

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boys achieved vocational qualifications. The Tiefoe data show boys to have a slight advantage in attainment over girls.

All the survey participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. To this end completed questionnaires have been coded, e.g. MW20 = mature woman, questionnaire 20, TW56 = teenage woman, questionnaire 56.

Issues of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity are always important considerations. At its simplest, informed consent means that participants should understand what the study is about and what is to be done with their information. They should understand that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time. But even this simple statement is problematic, what constitutes 'informed consent' and would participants have the confidence to refuse, withdraw, or retract?

Berg (1989) suggests that survey participants are deemed to have 'implied' consent when they complete and return questionnaires, but this takes no account of influential others and context. For example, are these teenage women implying consent when they complete questionnaires, or are they responding to peer behaviour and/or teacher authority? It is possible that some of the teenage women contested the request by voiding their papers, that is by only completing personal details and others by working in tandem, as shown in the following quotes:

*No 6, personal attitudes didn't have appropriate middle box for those who didn't feel either way (TW/127).*

*Number 6, personal attitudes, did not have appropriate boxed answers to answer the questions given, thoroughly (TW/129).*

I feel that the issue of informed consent is closely allied to how potential participants are briefed by the agents who are distributing the questionnaire. I issued a small number of questionnaires to participants in the mature women's group, but I had no control over how the majority of the mature women and all teenage women were briefed. Reflecting on this process I realise that I would have preferred to have had more control, but the practicalities made this impossible.



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#### Survey design

The survey design includes reflections on my own learning experiences and ideas from Whitehead's (1994) work regarding girls' attitudes to academic success and life choices. Although Whitehead's research interest is different to mine, she is concerned with the relationship between female stereotyping and academic success, there are a number of similar points of reference, for example, she explores factors relating to ability, home background, educational experiences and sex stereotyping, factors I had identified in my exploration of aspirational/expectational development in Chapter Two of the thesis. I was particularly interested in Whitehead's questions concerning social attitudes because I felt that factors influencing aspirational/expectational development were probably submerged in this area. I wrote to Dr Whitehead explaining my work and requested a copy of the instrument she had used, which she very kindly supplied. I have adapted her section on social attitudes (App12:pp274-277) for my own use. The questionnaire consists of eight sections, as outlined below:

No	Category	Purpose - To identify:
1	General Information	group selection criteria & contact information
2	Compulsory State Education	type of school attended, exams taken & attitudes to school
3	Continuing Education & Learning	own and influential others' attitudes to girls' continuing education
4	Teenage Women's Aspirations & Expectations	teenage women's aspirations/expectations & their parents' expectations for them
5	Mature Women's Aspirations & Expectations	mature women's aspirations/expectations & their parents' expectations for them
6	Social Attitudes	participants' attitudes to adult life roles
7	Family Background	number of siblings, social class, parental employment, division of domestic labour
8	Open Comments Section	any additional comments or points to be raised

**Table 1: Questionnaire Construction**

In the first draft the questions were mostly qualitative, which resulted in a lengthy document that initial volunteers estimated would take approximately an hour to complete. This was far too long and would probably have discouraged organisations from becoming involved and participants from completing the instrument. Subsequently, most of the questions were redesigned in a quantitative format, which reduced the length and, I hoped, increased the likelihood of completion.

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The next step was to pilot the instrument. *'I ... admit to initially finding this stage a bit of a chore. Whilst I understood the logic of and necessity for conducting a pilot, I wanted to ... get the real thing done'* (RD:1998:69). However, I changed my mind as the pilot data began to identify a number of unclear, ambiguous or redundant questions. Ironically, there were requests for 'comments' space, I say ironic because I had removed this feature to reduce the length. As a compromise an optional comments section was included at the end.

The redesigned questionnaire and covering letter (App13:pp278-289) were distributed by agents in the schools and agents and myself in the training organisation. The numbers issued and returned are show below:

GROUP	NO. ISSUED	NO. RETURNED	VOID	RESPONSE RATE
Mature Women	102	84	0	82%
Teenage Women	225	157	2	70%

**Table 2: Survey Participation**

Obtaining a high response rate is crucial if the data are to have any meaning. As people who respond to surveys generally differ from those who do not (Bell:1999), if the response rate is low, the data may be unreliable. Cohen & Manion (1989) suggest that researchers should be looking for a minimum of a 40% return rate. As I have an 82% and a 70% return rate, I feel confident that the data obtained from this survey represent an accurate picture of the two groups' experiences and as such provides a reliable platform on which to base the subsequent interviews.

#### **Analysis & Presentation of Survey Data**

The survey is to gather a broad range of ideas that will inform the interviews, therefore in the analysis I have used simple percentages and frequencies to show general trends and strength of feeling regarding particular issues. The presentation of the survey data below relates to aspects of the participants' educational experiences, family influences, social attitudes and aspirations and expectations. Question numbers are inserted in brackets where appropriate, and MW = mature women and TW = teenage women in extracts from the participants.

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### SURVEY – Participants and analysis of survey data

#### Educational experiences

In discussing educational experiences the following factors have been considered: type of school attended; subject preferences; examinations and influential others.

The type of school participants attended (Q2.1) highlights developments in educational organisation that have occurred over the time frame of the study. 30% of the mature women attended secondary modern schools, 23% grammar schools and 2% technical schools, which illustrates the educational provision that resulted from the 1944 Education Act. During the late 1960s, early 1970s comprehensive school organisation was becoming the norm and it is possible that many of the mature women who stated that their school was comprehensive (38%) were caught up in this reorganisation. Although some of the teenage women (14%) indicated that they attend secondary modern schools, the majority (72%) said they attend comprehensives. This is puzzling given that both the schools participating in the survey are comprehensives.

The type of school attended influences both subjects studied and exams taken. On the premise that subject choice is one factor impacting on future employment opportunities, I was interested to find out what subjects the participants most liked and disliked (Qs 2.4 & 2.5) and have grouped specifically mentioned subjects – admittedly somewhat arbitrarily – into the following categories:

<b>Subject Area</b>	<b>Includes:</b>
<b>Maths &amp; Science</b>	Biology, Economics, Geometry, Trigonometry, Physics, Chemistry, Maths, Science
<b>Humanities</b>	English, English Literature, Foreign Languages, History, Geography, Religious Education/Instruction, Child Development
<b>Arts &amp; Crafts</b>	Art, Domestic Science/Home Economics/Food Technology, Drama, Dance, Media Studies, Needlework, Pottery, Textiles
<b>Business Related</b>	Accounts, Business Studies, Careers, IT/Computers, Office Studies, Shorthand/Typing, Work Experience
<b>Sport</b>	

**Table 3: Subject Categorisation**

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Tables 4 & 5 show the actual frequencies of stated subject likes and dislikes:

Subject Area	Mature Women (Frequency)	Teenage Women (Frequency)
<b>Maths &amp; Science</b>	5	1
<b>Humanities</b>	36	22
<b>Arts &amp; Crafts</b>	33	12
<b>Business Related</b>	3	13
<b>Sport</b>	19	12

**Table 4: Favourite Subjects**

Subject Area	Mature Women (Frequency)	Teenage Women (Frequency)
<b>Maths &amp; Science</b>	30	25
<b>Humanities</b>	14	8
<b>Arts &amp; Crafts</b>	11	4
<b>Business Related</b>	2	4
<b>Sport</b>	23	3

**Table 5: Least Favourite Subjects**

From their responses one can see that favourite subjects are located in the Humanities and Arts – traditional ‘feminine’ subjects, whilst least preferred subjects are Maths & Science – traditional ‘masculine’ subjects. One of the mature women said that her father was *“very keen that we should study “proper” subjects like science. Unfortunately I wasn’t a scientist and struggled over this one”* (MW/8), suggesting that maths and science have a cachet that humanities and arts do not. Under the terms of the National Curriculum, girls are now required to continue with maths and science subjects until GCSEs are completed; nevertheless these remain the teenage women’s least favourite subjects, just as they were the mature women’s least favourite subjects.

One area of change is the teenage women’s increased involvement in business-related subjects. Not only has their involvement increased, so too has the variety of subjects available under this heading. The mature women only had the choice of shorthand and typing.

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As well as changes in school organisation and curriculum, the type of and access to qualifications (Q 2.2) is also an important factor in relation to future employment opportunities. Table 6 shows the types of examinations participants attained:

	<b>None (%)</b>	<b>‘O’s (%)</b>	<b>‘A’s (%)</b>	<b>CSE (%)</b>	<b>GCSE (%)</b>	<b>GNVQ (%)</b>	<b>Other (%)</b>
Mature Women	8	46	26	36	13	1	7
Teenage Women	1	1	7	6	92	1	1

**Table 6: Examinations**

8% of the mature women took no examinations at all, probably because prior to the Beloe Report of 1965 many secondary modern schools did not offer public examinations. The Beloe Report recommended the introduction of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) for pupils whose ability fell short of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) standard, i.e. mainly those attending secondary modern schools. 36% of the mature women did take CSEs. In addition, 46% took ‘O’ level GCEs, and 26% went on to do ‘A’ level GCEs. Nevertheless, of those taking ‘O’ levels, just under half did not go on to ‘A’ levels.

In the teenage women’s data, ‘O’ levels and CSEs show a marked decline. The vast majority (92%) have taken the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). This was introduced in 1986 to replace both the GCE and the CSE and create a single examination system that, theoretically at least, removed the inequity of a majority of pupils taking a lower status exam – i.e. the CSE. Only 7% of the teenage women have indicated they will continue with ‘A’ levels, but it is possible that the majority have not yet made the decision one way or the other.

Feeding directly into educational experience is the influence of peers, teachers and parents (Qs 3-1 – 3.9). Peer influence can be hugely influential; attitudes to all manner of things are developed within these peer relationships, attitudes to education, subject preferences, teachers, aspirations and expectations for the future. One example of peer influence that I looked at concerns attitudes relating to continuing education.

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	<b>High Discourage (%)</b>	<b>Discourage (%)</b>	<b>Slight Discourage (%)</b>	<b>Slight Encourage (%)</b>	<b>Encourage (%)</b>	<b>High Encourage (%)</b>
<b>Mature Women</b>	1	2	20	21	30	14
<b>Teenage Women</b>	0	1	8	30	34	23

**Table 7: Peer Attitudes to Continuing Education (Q 3.7)**

Table 7 shows that the teenage women's perceptions of peer support for continuing education is higher than that of the mature women, but overall the strength of peer encouragement for continuing education is not as strong as I expected.

As well as peers, teachers' encouragement – or lack of it – also affects pupils' attitudes to education.

	<b>Teachers</b>			
	<b>Discouragement (%)</b>		<b>Encouragement (%)</b>	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>Mature Women</b>	8	18	71	73
<b>Teenage Women</b>	2	1	97	98

**Table 8: Teachers' Encouragement (Q 3.5 & 3.6)**

I asked participants to think about teachers' encouragement or discouragement to boys **and** girls, to determine if they perceive teachers to be engaging in gendered support. From their responses it would appear that they think both girls and boys receive very high, equal, levels of encouragement from teachers. The one difference that is apparent relates to cohort rather than gender, in that the mature women's perception of teacher encouragement is lower, and discouragement higher than the teenage women's perceptions.

Many of the participants made specific comments regarding their teachers (Qs 2.4 & 2.5). For example, in illustrating the positive influence of teachers, they remark they

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had “*Respect from teachers*” (TW/192), they had “*Friendly teachers*” (TW/155), “*Good and efficient teachers*” (MW/87). One of the mature women makes a pertinent point when she says, “*if you liked the teacher you usually enjoyed the lesson regardless of the subject*” (MW/98).

However, the data contain more negative than positive remarks about teachers, particularly from the mature women. One mature woman with dyslexia spoke about her experiences: “[I] was not given any help for my problem, and was deliberately humiliated by teachers, in front of pupils, because of my reading and wrighting problem” (MW/54). She feels that “*a lot of changes need to be made to the state education system. I myself feel failed by the state system, and have many friends (male and female) who feel the same way*”(MW/54). Two other mature women remarked, “*I had a teacher who took us for needlework, if you made a mistake she would shout at you and make you look so stupid in front of the class*” (MW/1), and “*Most teachers were bullies and only had time for ‘high flyers’, known as ‘teachers pets’*” (MW/6). For these three mature women at least, teacher influence was a negative experience.

Parents’ attitudes to education and their own level of education are further factors that influence girls’ own attitudes to education. Table 9 provides an indication of the participants’ family involvement in continuing education.

	Neither Parent (%)	Father – Yes (%)	Mother – Yes (%)	*Brother – Actual/ Probable (%)	*Brother – No (%)	*Sister – Actual/ Probable (%)	*Sister – No (%)
<b>Mature Women</b>	69	20	12	39	56	36	51
<b>Teenage Women</b>	50	26	26	51	12	42	17

**Table 9: Family Experience of Continuing Education (Q 7.3 - 7.7)**

[NB: \* percentages for the mature women are actual, those for the teenage women are actual/probable]

The mature women have limited family experience of continued education; the majority of their parents and siblings did not continue past compulsory schooling. By comparison, half the teenage women’s parents did continue their education, which

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may indicate an increasing incidence of extended post-school education. However, the teenage women's data show that it is the number of brothers who have or probably will continue their education that is increasing, whereas the number of sisters who have or probably will continue their education remains only slightly higher than that of the mature women.

Given limited parental participation in continued learning, how supportive are these parents to their children's education?

	Fathers				Mothers			
	Discourage (%)		Encourage (%)		Discourage (%)		Encourage (%)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>Mature Women</b>	14	25	74	63	10	21	82	71
<b>Teenage Women</b>	5	3	92	94	3	2	95	98

**Table 10: Fathers' & Mothers' Encouragement (Qs 3.1 – 3.4)**

The participants' perceptions are that both fathers and mothers are considerably more encouraging than discouraging to girls and boys in both groups, with mothers providing slightly more encouragement than fathers overall. Again, cohort rather than gender differentiates the groups, with the mature women indicating that they received more discouragement and less encouragement than both their male peers and the teenage women.

This does not mean that gender is absent. Some of the mature women made gender-related remarks implying that education was considered to be more important for boys than it was for girls and they also touch on the influence of social class. For example, *"I left school early, not because of lack of encouragement from teachers, but from my parents. They were traditional working class in their outlook and beliefs"* (MW/53). *"My one regret in life is that I didn't get a better education. At the time it wasn't an important issue with my parents."* (MW/83). None of the teenage women expressed views of this nature; they feel that their parents almost universally believe that education is as important for girls as it is for boys.



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On the whole, both the mature and the teenage women have experienced positive support for their education, so how do they feel about their own continued learning?

	High Discourage (%)	Discourage (%)	Slight Discourage (%)	Slight Encourage (%)	Encourage (%)	High Encourage (%)
<b>Mature Women</b>	1	1	1	10	42	36
<b>Teenage Women</b>	1	1	7	9	30	51

**Table 11: Participants' Attitudes to Their Own Continued Learning (Q 3.9)**

Given the cohort differential, I was not surprised to find that the teenage women show more motivation to continue their learning than the mature women did. What does surprise me is that the teenage women's level of motivation is nearer to the lower level of their peers (Table 7) than to the higher levels of their teachers (Table 8) and parents (Table 10).

#### Family influences

Learning, as one participant pointed out, is not restricted to formal educational environments, *"Life experience is often the best teacher and the best experiences are not always found in a school setting"* (MW/6). A particularly powerful, non-school site of learning is the family and Section 7 of the questionnaire (Qs 7.1 – 7.13) examines participants' childhood family experiences in relation to housework, childcare and parental employment. Tables 12 & 13 show mothers + fathers as one category, and then mothers and father separately because not all families contain two parents, particularly those of the teenage women.

	Self (%)	Father (%)	Mother (%)	Father+ Mother (%)	Sister(s) (%)	Brother(s) (%)
<b>Mature Women</b>	25	6	79	13	12	0
<b>Teenage Women</b>	30	18	57	35	14	8

**Table 12: Major Responsibility for Housework in Childhood Family**

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	<b>Self</b>	<b>Father</b>	<b>Mother</b>	<b>Father+ Mother</b>	<b>Sister(s)</b>	<b>Brother(s)</b>
	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Mature Women</b>	7	2	67	19	6	5
<b>Teenage Women</b>	8	19	36	52	7	5

**Table 13: Major Responsibility for Childcare in Childhood Family**

The mature women's perceptions are that they grew up in households where mothers had the main responsibility for housework and childcare, where daughters were expected to take a greater share of these responsibilities than sons. Indeed, fathers and brothers took very little part in these activities. Some of the mature women believe that nurturing is 'natural' to females, "*women, due to their nature, are better carers than men so should remain as major raisers of children*" (MW/5); "*a woman's major role in life - if she has children - is to care for and guide those children*" (MW/70), thus some of the mature women present childcare as a woman's 'natural' responsibility. None of the teenage women made comments of this kind, indeed some of the teenage women cite examples of increased father/male partner involvement in housework and childcare, although their brothers' involvement remains minimal.

Questions relating to parental employment (Qs 7.9 & 7.10) are included because parental occupations and employment attitudes influence a girl's perception of available opportunities as well as her own attitudes to employment. I have attempted to classify parental occupations according to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (1990) Standard Occupational Classification (App14:pp290-292). This was not a straightforward task because some of the stated occupations were difficult to classify, e.g. Metro Inspector, Shipyard Worker, Catering, and Special Needs Worker. However, this work did enable me to gain an idea of the participants' parental employment experiences, thus Table 14 is a generalised summary of parental occupations.

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Standard Occupational Classification		Fathers (%)		Mothers (%)	
		Mature Women	Teenage Women	Mature Women	Teenage Women
1	Managers & Administrators	19	9	2	6
2	Professional Occupations	6	5	2	6
3	Associate Professional & Technical Occupations	5	9	10	5
4	Clerical & Secretarial Occupations	5	3	6	23
5	Craft & Related Occupations	27	25	5	1
6	Personal & Protective Service Occupations	2	3	7	12
7	Sales Occupations	1	1	11	9
8	Plant & Machine Operatives	7	8	2	1
9	Other Occupations (Labourers & related workers)	13	8	13	5
	Disabled		1		
	Housework/Housewife		1	27	3
	Ill Health	1	3		
	Stated 'None' for Q:7.10			4	3
	Left Qs 7.9 & 7.10 blank	7	20	7	23
	Unable to classify	6	8	4	4

**Table 14: Classification of Parental Occupations**

Generally, fathers in both groups cluster in craft and related occupations (eg electricians, engineers, joiners, labourers, etc). The picture for mothers is somewhat more varied; they tend to cluster in teaching, sales and cleaning occupations. The teenage women's data show a substantial rise in the number of mothers in category 4 – clerical occupations, and the occupation of 'housewife' has dropped like a stone. However, this interpretation may be misleading insofar as 23% of the teenage women left Q:7.10 relating to mothers' occupation blank. Nevertheless, the majority of these mature and teenage women have experience of mothers working outside the home.

#### Social attitudes

Section 6 of the questionnaire (Qs 6.1 – 6.28) asks participants to indicate their strength of feeling regarding certain stereotypical social attitudes. Percentage results for each statement are shown in Appendix 15 (pp293-294).

Participants in both groups express perceptions of social change, for example: *"Society is slowly changing and women are now wanting and trying to do things with their life because it's what they want. They are starting to believe that they do matter. Things can't change properly for women unless men see this too"* (MW/17).

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*“... it is society's view that women should get married and have children, however, it is also recognised that women should have the opportunity to have jobs” (TW/200).*

*“You can't say that women have to stay at home because the stereotypes in today's society are always changing ... they are portrayed in the media in different ways” (TW/231).*

Various threads contribute to these perceptions of social change. For example, being independent is very important (6.6, 6.17) to these mature and teenage women, dependency on a partner, particularly financial dependency, is dissatisfying (6.26). However, independence is by no means a clear-cut concept. The teenage women suggest that women do need traditional male protection and support (6.9), whereas the mature women think that the male 'breadwinner' stereotype limits both male and female freedom in choosing what they want to be (6.19).

There is strong agreement that housework and childcare should be shared activities, particularly where both partners are working (6.1). The teenage women feel strongly that men should be able to take on the role of main child-carer if they want to (6.10, 6.15). It is interesting that 'choice' is implied here – for men at least, whereas there doesn't seem to be any implication that women have that choice. The teenage women are opposed to the view that marriage is the 'correct' life-choice (6.13), that a woman's self-respect depends on her being married (6.16). In some cases they feel strongly that having a good career is more important than getting married (6.24).

In terms of employment both groups believe that men are given preference over women in appointments, promotions and training, although the teenage women suggest that this is changing, *“In some cases men do get preferences over women. But nowadays it's more equal in the working environment”* (TW/150). Men are not considered to be failures if they don't earn enough to support the family (6.8), neither does a man necessarily have to earn more than a woman in a partnership (6.20). The participants reject the idea that women's pay can be less than men's because women do not have families to support (6.27), that work-based training is wasted on women because they will leave work when they have children (6.25). They also reject the

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position that women only work outside the home in order to contribute to the family income (6.14), or that they should only work in ‘feminine’ occupations (6.5).

Overall, the mature women suggest that much social change (6.21) has already taken place, *“The position of women has changed dramatically since I was at school. I started work before the concept of equal opportunity existed. Women now have more opportunities to succeed both at school and in a career”* (MW/53), whereas the teenage women feel that traditional male/female roles still require further change.

#### Aspirations and expectations

Given all these influences, what aspirations and expectations (Qs 4.1 - 4.2 & 5.1 – 5.2) did/do the participants have for their futures?

	<b>Remain Single (%)</b>	<b>Marriage (%)</b>	<b>Children (%)</b>	<b>Ed &amp; Learning (%)</b>	<b>Non- employed (%)</b>	<b>Job (%)</b>	<b>Career (%)</b>
<b>Mature Women</b>	20	42	35	40	5	55	48
<b>Teenage Women</b>	3	67	66	54	7	57	72

**Table 15: Aspirations on Leaving School**

The mature women’s highest aspirations relate to jobs and careers and quite a few of them aspired to the single life. The teenage women, on the other hand, aspire to marriage, children and careers. I find it surprising that the teenage women’s aspirations for marriage and children are considerably stronger than those of the mature women; I would have anticipated the results to run in the opposite direction.

Although the teenage women appear to hold traditional female role aspirations, when employment is added, their aspirations become more complex.

	<b>Marriage (%)</b>	<b>Children (%)</b>	<b>Job (%)</b>	<b>Career (%)</b>
<b>Mature Women</b>	42	35	55	48
<b>Teenage Women</b>	67	66	57	72

**Table 16: Marriage, Children, Job & Career Aspirations**

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The teenage women's 'job' aspirations are practically the same as those of the mature women, but their 'career' aspirations have increased by about a third. Is this a case of the teenage women aspiring to 'have it all' whereas the mature women had to make a choice between marriage/motherhood and career?

If aspirations are the things that women strive for, and expectations are those things that are likely to happen, how do participants' expectations compare with their aspirations?

	<b>Remain Single (%)</b>	<b>Marriage (%)</b>	<b>Children (%)</b>	<b>Ed &amp; Learning (%)</b>	<b>Non- employed (%)</b>	<b>Job (%)</b>	<b>Career (%)</b>
<b>Mature Women</b>	17	55	58	40	11	62	23
<b>Teenage Women</b>	3	66	65	48	5	57	65

**Table 17: Expectations on Leaving School**

In all categories other than career, the mature and teenage women display very similar expectations with the roles of wife and mother being the strongest expectations. Fewer of the teenage women expect to remain single or not to work.

The main difference is that the teenage women not only aspire to careers, they also expect to have careers, often in addition to being wives and mothers. The mature women expected to become wives and mothers even though these were by no means their overwhelming aspirations. Almost half of the mature women had held career aspirations, but less than a quarter expected to fulfil them, what they expected was a job rather than a career. Indeed, the mature women's career aspirations dropped as their wife/mother expectations increased.

**Discussion of survey data**

A number of questions and issues arise from the survey data. Taking educational experience first – changes in school organisation, curriculum and examinations may be publicly disseminated as striving for equality, and no doubt there are people genuinely committed to the principle of educational equality. However, there are also other powerful influences at work here too, e.g. factions who seek to maintain the

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social status quo, its gender/class relations and related power structures; and those who have national/international economic interests.

In any generation the national interest requires 'suitably' qualified workers and education serves as one of the primary means by which young people 'learn' about occupational positioning. If 'female' subject preferences have implications for the kinds of employment opportunities open to women, why do girls continue to prefer traditional 'female' subjects? Do schools influence subject choices? Are girls aware of the employment limitations these subject preferences lead to and whose interests are served by explaining/not explaining this link? Given that the teenage women's self-motivation for continuing their education is quite low and their career aspirations high, have they made the connection between education and career development?

What factors contribute to this low support for continuing education? Do girls continue to worry about being 'different', about being considered 'unfeminine' if they pursue academic achievement? As far as the mature women are concerned this argument may have had some relevance insofar as academic achievement for them could have been regarded as a barrier to social success and the acquisition of a husband. But does this argument still hold today when girls are now outperforming boys academically, when public dissemination of this message means that academic achievement no longer singles girls out as being different? If it is now socially acceptable for girls to achieve academically, what other explanations might there be for the teenage women's low motivation to continue their education?

One explanation might be the way in which social class, gender and economics intersect with education, for example in relation to the costs incurred in pursuing higher education. There is an argument that working-class people, and working-class women in particular, are worried about the debt now attaching to continuing education, particularly in light of the fact that women still generally earn less than men, regardless of their level of qualifications. An article in the Times Higher Educational Supplement (14.3.03) claims that due to the gender imbalance in earnings *'the average female graduate will never be able to repay her student debt'*. If the fear of debt theory has credence then it would seem pointless for working-class girls to

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aspire to continuing their education. The problem with this logic is that renouncing continuing education has knock-on effects for career aspirations.

Finally, the participants' low motivation for continuing their education conflicts with levels of parental encouragement. Given that most of the participants' parents did not continue their own education, why are they so encouraging of their daughters' education? What has changed to make these parents believe that education is just as important for girls as it is for boys? What do parents see as being the benefits for their daughters of a good education? And, perhaps more to the point, are they willing and able to pay for it?

The next area to be considered is family influence. It is almost impossible to abstract oneself from familial socialisation processes. Whether one accommodates or resists the roles observed in the family, there is no denying their influence. A mother's attitude to wifehood, motherhood and employment will affect the daughter's attitude to these roles, positively or negatively. Most of these participants' mothers have the major responsibility for housework and childcare, and most of them have also engaged in paid employment. These mothers do not conform to the traditional full-time wife/mother role; rather they also include varying degrees of employment. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that in the teenage women's families, some fathers/male partners are participating in domestic and childcare tasks. Will this change in male attitudes and practices impact on the teenage women's expectations of their own future partners?

Looking at the participants' aspirations and expectations, the mature women expected to become wives and mothers, whether they wanted to or not. The teenage women, on the other hand, have high career aspirations *and* expectations, together with strong marriage and motherhood aspirations. How have the teenage women developed these strong career aspirations? It is true that there is a high incidence of maternal employment in these groups, however, this tends to cluster in traditional 'female' occupations of office work, care work, domestic work etc, rather than in 'careers'. What do the teenage women understand by the term 'career'? Will their occupational positions differ from those of their mothers? How will their marriage and motherhood aspirations intersect with their career plans?



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Whilst the participants identify aspects of social change relating to women's widening opportunities, they also note the contradictions attaching to women's lives. On the one hand, women are still seen as wives and mothers, on the other, they are also seen as employees. Interestingly, the teenage women think that the struggle for equality is over, that women are now just about equal. In their view the feminist struggle is little more than an historical footnote, a struggle that has been resolved and has little relevance to their own lives, *"Just because women were not treated equally in the past ... Men and women are basically equal at this point of time"* (TW/152). Once these teenage women have left school, will they have to contest inequality to make their aspirations a reality, both at home and at work, will they achieve their aspirations or will they have to conform to the more traditional feminine roles?

#### Summary

As the survey data show, there have been changes in educational experience across the time span of the two groups. But what is education for? How does it intersect with class, gender and employment? Do 'feminine' subject preferences impact on women's aspirations? What are the benefits for girls of academic achievement?

The survey data show that mothers have the major responsibility for domestic and childcare tasks, often in addition to being employed, although the teenage women suggest that fathers/male partners are beginning to participate in these tasks. Will this change impact on their own role expectations and those of their future partners?

Although they did not aspire to be, most of the mature women expected to be wives and mothers, whereas the teenage women aspire and expect to have careers, as well as marriage and motherhood. Maternal employment in these groups clusters in traditional female occupations such as office, care and domestic work rather than 'careers'. Will the teenage women's occupational sectors/levels differ from those of their mothers? How will marriage and motherhood intersect with their career aspirations?

These are just a few of the issues and questions arising in the survey data, issues and questions which are expanded in the interviews. The data collected from the interviews are presented as an oral history in Chapters 4-11.

**APPENDIX 2**

**Access letter to schools regarding survey participation**

Linda Barlow-Meade M Ed BA Hons  
Address

Telephone No:

Date

Dear

I am writing to you to request assistance with my PhD research, as a student of the University of Northumbria at Newcastle in the Faculty of Health, Social Work & Education, Coach Lane Campus.

My thesis concerns an exploration of the impact of women's learning experiences on their life expectations and aspirations. To that end I am proposing working with a group of women attending community learning programmes and a group of schoolgirls in the final year of compulsory state education.

Would it be possible for me to come in and talk to you about this research and about the possibility of issuing a questionnaire to your full Year 11 (all bands/sets) girls?

I can be contacted on the above phone number. If I am not available then my answerphone will be on for you to leave a message, or alternatively I enclose a SAE.

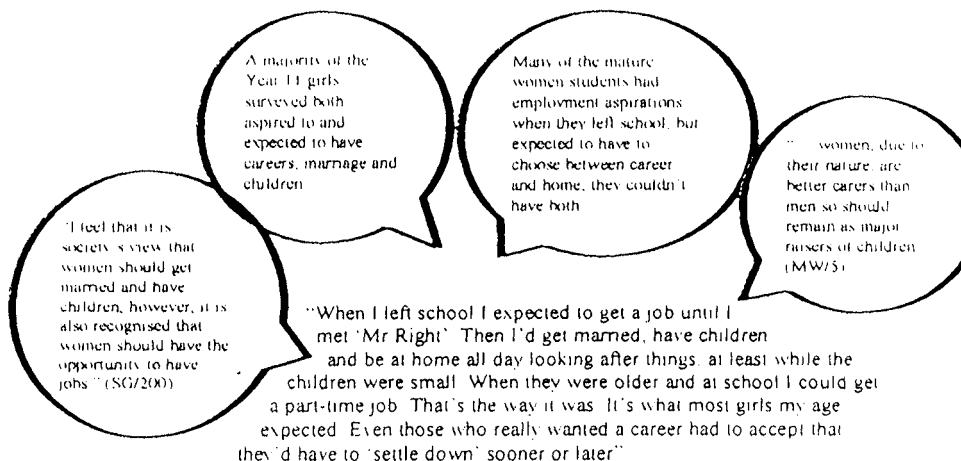
I appreciate that you are very busy and thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely

Linda Barlow-Meade M Ed BA Hons

# MAKING CHOICES OR HAVING IT ALL

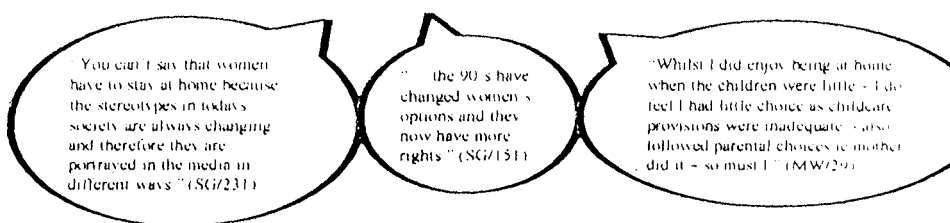
## A DISCUSSION OF ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS



Alys looked at her mother, "Were you happy about that? Did you want a career?" "Happy". her mother replied, "we didn't think about it much. There was nothing to think about, that's just the way it was". "Well, it's not going to be that way for me. Things are equal now. We don't have to choose between careers and home, we can do both"

"If you have a career - and I'm not saying you shouldn't try for that - I'm saying, if you have a career, get married and have children, how are you going to manage it all?" Alys shrugged her shoulders. "It's not like when you were young, you know. Men share the housework now, and they help to look after the children. I mean, look at dad, he does a lot of things in the house and whoever I end up with will have to do his share too"

"Mmmm, that's true. Your grandfather didn't do any housework, and he didn't look after us very often either. Your dad does much more than mine used to do". "That's what I mean mum. I don't have to worry about trying to do it all on my own. It'll be equal shares, so I can follow my career too. A lot of women have careers now, you see them on the telly all the time. If they can do it, so can I"



## APPENDIX 3 cont ...

### Pre-interview information for potential interviewees

The starting point for this study has been to survey a number of Year 11 girls and mature women students asking them about their aspirations and expectations at the point of leaving school. Aspirations are defined as 'The life choices most desired' and expectations are defined as 'The life choices most likely to be made'.

A majority of the Year 11 girls both aspired to and expected to have a career, marriage and motherhood, more or less at the same time. On the other hand, whilst many of the mature women students had employment aspirations when they left school, they expected that they would have to make a choice between work and home once they were married. They didn't expect to be able to have both at the same time.

In the next part of the study I would like to explore these findings further by talking about the people and experiences that may play a part in how we form our aspirations and expectations. To help me do this, could you please think about the discussion topics on the next page. Please feel free to make notes on the topics, and any others that you would like to discuss.

It is important to stress that what is expressed above represents the views of the particular groups surveyed. Your views may be similar or they may be different, there are no 'right' or 'wrong' viewpoints to these topics. I am interested in what you think and look forward to talking with you.

# Thank You

INT/MW/\_\_\_\_\_

## MAKING CHOICES OR HAVING IT AL DISCUSSION TOPICS

- ☞ What life choices did you and your friends have when you left school?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ How do you think these choices came about in the first place?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ What helped / prevented achievement of your life plans?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ Are the choices the same or different for girls leaving school today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ Why do you think choices are the same / different for girls today?

INT/SG/ \_\_\_\_\_

## **MAKING CHOICES OR HAVING IT AL DISCUSSION TOPICS**

- ☞ What life choices do you think women of your mum's / gran's generation had when they left school?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ How do you think these choices came about in the first place?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ Are the choices the same or different for you and your friends?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ Why do you think your choices are the same / different?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ☞ What will help / prevent achievement of your life plans?

**Introduction**

Thank for taking part

Anonymity - what name would you like to be called by?

**Education**

Can we start by talking about school

School likes/dislikes etc

Exams

Is education as important for girls as for boys?

Past/present educational experience

Careers advice

**Aspirations & Expectations**

Most desired adult choices

Is this the same as what you actually expect to do?

Aspirational/expectational influences

Past/present aspirations/expectations

Are these the same/different to yours?

**Family Life**

Family background / what mother-father do / brothers & sisters etc

Household / childcare tasks

Will your adult family life be the same or different? How/why?

**Women's Role**

Past present expectations of women's role

How do women learn these things?

Role models/messages

Do you think male/female roles need to change?

**Employment**

Work experience

Employment opportunities – better or worse for women than previously

Equal employment opportunities

**Social Change**

Types of social changes over the past 50 years

Have these changes affected women lives?

Feminism

Can you yourself influence change?

**Conclusion**

Any other questions/topics

Thank you



## Annotation keys used in interview tape transcription

ANNOTATION KEYS USED IN TRANSCRIPTIONS

[   ]	Background information
...	Pause
...    ...    ...	Long pause
(...)	Material edited out
(   )	Non-verbal material, e.g. (laughs)
<b>Bold Text</b>	Strong emphasis
_____	Tape inaudible
[     ]	Researcher edit

**APPENDIX 6**

**Sample pages of a mature woman's transcript**

179 school. Well I was one of the first lot that ever did that, I was in the first  
180 year that ever did that. So I actually, I failed my 11+, went to secondary  
181 modern and then at 13 transferred across to the comprehensive which was  
182 the best thing I did.

183

184 R Hmm. How did it feel at the time?

185

186 J Oh, erm. I'd been sort of like a big fish in a little pond and going across  
187 to a comprehensive was literally, it's like two and a half thousand pupils.  
188 was, was a big, big shock, a big, big shock. Erm, plus the fact that, I can  
189 remember sort of like, my dad had been very ill and my mum couldn't  
190 afford sort of like the new uniform, not even the new tie. So I actually  
191 had to go in my old school uniform from my old school, and they were  
192 actually rivals, you know, had this rivalry between each other. That was  
193 awful for the first four months. I couldn't make my mum understand how  
194 it felt. And I think that stuck with me, I think for the first six months

195

196 But I was always in the 'A' stream. I was always in the top stream at  
197 school. And, and come sort of like 'O' levels and what have you, I mean  
198 even before I did my 'O' levels my dad wanted me to stay on at 6<sup>th</sup> form  
199 but I'd had enough. I wanted out. I'd, I'd had enough

200

**APPENDIX 6 cont ...**  
**Sample pages of a mature woman's transcript**

201 R Did erm, you go to the comprehensive with friends from secondary  
202 modern?

203

204 J Yes. There was, there was a group of us. I mean. Some of us did, some of  
205 us didn't. Erm, I mean basically you had to, your parents had to fill it in  
206 and stupidly, I think, my parents asked me what I wanted to do, erm,  
207 rather than saying 'we think this is the best option'. They, they were very  
208 casual about it. Erm, very much of the era, well, she's a girl, it's, it's not,  
209 it's not important.

210

211 R Mmm. Did you feel that at the time?

212

213 J Er. My dad was very insistent that he didn't want either me or my  
214 brother, whose quite a lot older than me, erm, to go to work in a factory.  
215 He was **determined** that neither of us would ever, ever work in a factory.  
216 Erm, he thought I'd like, erm, what you might call a blue-collar worker as  
217 the ambition \_\_\_\_\_. Erm, you know, sort of like shop work or something  
218 like that and erm, I think they got a bit of a shock because I mean, I got  
219 this job when I first left school, erm, in a shoe shop, and I was only there  
220 for 3 month and I knew there was no future and I, I **wanted** some sort of  
221 future at that stage.

222

**APPENDIX 6 cont ...**  
**Sample pages of a mature woman's transcript**

223           Ern, and went dental nursing and actually got somewhere where they  
224           would let me go on day-release. And I'd been there about a year when my  
225           boss retired and I couldn't, he was selling on the practice. Sorry, he  
226           wasn't, he was closing the practice. And I couldn't get another job where  
227           they would send me on day release. And I joined the QA, Queen  
228           Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corp  
229  
230           I finished my training there and of course from there got married and  
231           once you do that, everything goes up the creek. Ern . . . erm, had a few  
232           part-time jobs and temporary jobs as husband moved round for a couple  
233           of years.  
234  
235           Marriage split up er and I went nursing. Ern, did SRN up to intermediate  
236           Got back together with my husband, went out to Germany and had my  
237           son and came back here after my marriage finally did split up. And erm,  
238           went back to dental nursing here full-time. I found it too much trying to  
239           run a home on your own with a youngster and what have you  
240  
241           Went to working in personnel just part-time at a factory, Ern, and then  
242           got married again and did some office training. Went to work for an  
243           accountant part-time, then on to working for an engineering company

11

**APPENDIX 7**

**Sample pages of a teenage woman's transcript**

370 be a swot just because people say. And then they find themselves going  
371 up and on the dole an, cause they've listened to somebody else

372

373 R That's, that was going to be my next question actually, do you think that  
374 friends have a strong influence on what, on what you decide to do – for  
375 your sort or another sort of choice?

376

377 L I mean, for that, what you've just said there, for me, right. My friends.  
378 like I've gotta, we do a talk amongst ourselves and, but, it's my life. If  
379 them say, they could give us advice, and I might take their advice, but, I  
380 wouldn't expect them to be in a huff if I didn't take their advice, so I  
381 mean, it's nice to have advice off other people but at the end of the day,  
382 it's my life. Whatever happens, it should be my decision, cause then I  
383 can't blame anybody else but meself.

384

385 R That's good, yes. Cause I think you're right. I think sometimes, erm,  
386 young people do listen to their friends and as you've just said, end up  
387 doing less than they wanted to do

388

389 L Well, I'll tell you one thing. When I was younger, when I come to school  
390 I used to smoke, right, because me friends did. I've never bought a pack  
391 of tabs in me life, right, I just smoke what me friends were smoking. And

18

**APPENDIX 7 cont ...**  
**Sample pages of a teenage woman's transcript**

392           then I got older and, me mam and me dad found out, right. And they  
393           didn't hit us or they didn't shout at us, right. And me dad goes upstairs  
394           and he says 'Are you smoking?' And I tried to say somebody made us.  
395           and things like that. But anyway, he says, 'Louise', he went, oh it doesn't  
396           marra, he says, 'If you want to smoke, you can smoke'. He says, 'but it's  
397           gonna ruin your life, it's gonna blacken your lungs'. He tell us all the  
398           effects and things like that, but he, he give us a choice. And from that I  
399           thought, 'Eh well'. Most parents say 'Don't do this' and yer, cause, if  
400           someone says to yer 'don't do it', you do it for spite anyway, don't yer?  
401           And he says, and he's given us a choice, so what's going on here? And  
402           then from then I just, I just realized, I thought well, what am I doing. He  
403           is right. So I just, give up. I just stopped smoking.

404

405   R       I think that's a very good example, isn't it, because you do tend to, if  
406           somebody says 'don't do something', and they don't explain why, we go  
407           ahead and do it, and find out why.

408

409   L       And kids especially. They hate being told what to do, they hate being  
410           told what to do, so they just go ahead and do it anyway don't they?

411

412   R       And particularly, as you've said, if all your friends are doing the same  
413           thing because you don't like to be the odd one out.

**APPENDIX 7 cont ...**  
**Sample pages of a teenage woman's transcript**

- 414 L The friends I go with now, most of them don't smoke. But when I was  
415 younger, most of them did smoke. And me and me friends used to say  
416 like, to wer friends, and we used to go about with them, we were only  
417 about 12, and we used to say like, 'Oh can I have a draw', and we used to  
418 put their tabs out  
419 (laughter)  
420 We used to try and stop them smoking. So my sister, she's younger than  
421 me, and she's the same age as I was when I started smoking, and she's  
422 smoking. And I've talked to her. She knows, she realizes, but she still  
423 smokes  
424  
425 R It's interesting isn't it, because they do tell us that more girls than boys  
426 smoke now  
427  
428 L Hnm. It's because boys aren't bothered what other people think. They  
429 don't do what they're friends think. Girls do. Girls, the most important  
430 thing, for a girl, is her reputation. If she wants to have a good reputation  
431 she thinks she's gorra be like everybody else.  
432  
433 R It's almost a contradiction that, isn't it?  
434  
435

**APPENDIX 8**  
**Descriptor codes entered on interview transcripts**

CODE	DESCRIPTION
AB	Ability
ABU	Abuse
ACH	Achievement
AL	Adult life
ASPS	Aspirations
ATTS	Attitudes
BAR	Barriers
BEH	Behaviour
BEN	Benefits of taking part in the study
CA	Careers Advice at school
CAC	Contestation, Agency and Change
CAR	Careers – Separate code for Careers Advice at school
CHD	Children
CHDC	Childcare
CHO	Choices
COL	College
CUL	Culture – including Context
DAD	Dad
DIS	Discipline
DISC	Discrimination
DOM	Domestic
ED	Education – Separate codes for FE & HE
EMO	Emotions
EMP	Employment
ENV	Environment
EQU	Equality
EXAM	Exams
EXP	Expectations
FAM	Family
FE	Further Education
FEM	Feminism / Femininity
FIN	Finance
GEN	Gender
HE	Higher Education
LEA	Learning
MAR	Marriage / Partnership
MED	Media
MUM	Mum
NAT	Nature/Nurture – including Maturation
OPPS	Opportunities
PAR	Parents – Separate codes for DAD & MUM
PER	Personality
PEER	Peers
POL	Politics
POSS	Possessions
POW	Power
PRES	Pressure
PROF	Professionals / Experts
QUAL	Qualifications
REF	Reflections
REL	Religion
RES	Responsibility
RM	Role Models



**APPENDIX 8 cont ...**  
**Descriptor codes entered on interview transcripts**

CODE	DESCRIPTION
ROLE	Male/female roles
SCH	School
SIB	Siblings
SocA	Social Activities
SocC	Social Class
ST	Stereotypes
STAT	State legislation
SUB	Subjects
TEA	Teachers
TRG	Training

WE Work Experience  
 TEA Teachers  
 TRG Training

# APPENDIX 9

## Samples pages of mature women's interview analysis database

Interview Analysis - Mature Women 11/9/2003

Ref No	Line Nos	Code	Events	Discourses
G1-2	51-54	AB	I was really back with my maths, it's maths now, 'rithmetic when I went to school	Education
G1-2	210-235	AB	Some bairns have got a good brain on them, some haven't, it's a bit hard on them	Ability
G1-3	59-74	AB	All pupils entered for science regardless of ability	Ability
G1-3	196-199	AB	I was always in the 'A' stream, always in the top stream at school	Ability
G1-3	306-316	AB	Teachers encouraged girls to do science, and I was quite good at maths	Education
G1-3	940-958	AB	Example of a girl who wanted to be an architect & importance of parent pressure	Female Role
G1-3	969-983	AB	If girls today are bright & get the attention they get the opportunity	Ability/Change
G1-3	969-983	AB	Those from a trad or poor background, no money & not very bright, opps are limited	Class
G1-3	969-983	AB	Those from trad/poor background, no money, not very bright, opps are limited. It's a sha	Class/Ability
G1-3	969-983	AB	Even if they're not very bright, the opps are there if someone shows them how to open do	Ability
G1-3	1035-1042	AB	Girl down road - she's intelligent, fairly affluent family, focused, knows what she wants to	Ability/Family
G1-3	1035-1042	AB	Average/less intelligent, poor families, they seem quite aimless	Ability/Family
G1-3	1049-1061	AB	Example of teenage girl - pregnant - 'there was so much more for you', cause she's bright	Motherhood
G1-3	1046-1061	AB	Ex of teenage girl - pregnant - it's a tragedy because she had more in her head than that	Motherhood
G1-3	1075-1077	AB	It's difficult to judge. Lower intelligence/income, perpetuate the circle	Ability
G1-3	1340-1345	AB	It seems a shame when a woman's got it upstairs, that barrier, that glass wall is there	Employment
G1-4	437-444	AB	I was more highly qualified than husband, which doesn't mean much	Education
G1-4	80-94	AB	One or two had special abilities in different things and wanted to do that professionally	Ability/Asps
G1-4	147-159	AB	It'd sailed though 'O's without really working. 'A's were different, can't get away with short	Education
G1-4	170-173	AB	I was bright & easy going, I would ask questions. I got on with teachers	Education
G1-4	346-347	AB	I took psychology because I wasn't specifically good at anything else	Education
G1-5	178-190	AB	If parents have money & you've got brains, you'll get to uni, otherwise not	Ed/Family
G1-5	525-533	AB	You can only do so much housework, my brain's going to rot	Female Role
G1-5	1080-1093	AB	Example of a friend's daughter and her experience of failing exams	Education
G1-6	133-142	AB	Don't know how you got into the O group, don't know if there was some sort of test	Education
G1-6	147-155	AB	If you weren't in the O group, you just went to sch, waited for the bell & went home	Education
G1-6	157-164	AB	I could have done better, but the point was, I wasn't interested, didn't realise the importan	Education
G1-6	511-523	AB	Dad's academically bright. He was solitary, he was an only child. He had books	Parents
G1-6	673-677	AB	It's merit at the end of the day, not necessarily just that. You've got to do the thing	Education
G1-7	22-31	AB	I wasn't very good at maths, teacher didn't bother with me, said I should do more typing	Education
G1-7	140-160	AB	I wasn't brainy. Parents wanted me to leave sch cause I wasn't all that good	Ability/Parents
G1-7	310-312	AB	Enjoyed first job once I knew what I was doing. I liked dealing with people	Employment
G1-8	52-55	AB	Sch friends - pharmacist, physics, biology. Not a hope for me. I wasn't academic	Ed/Ability
G1-8	320-328	AB	On paper they weren't impressed with me, but I could sell myself on the telephone	

APPENDIX 9 cont ...

Samples pages of mature women's interview analysis database

11/9/2003

Interview Analysis - Mature Women

Ref No	Line Nos	Code	Events	Discourses
G1-10	23-31	AB	I got top marks in most things, even in maths & music that I didn't like. I did quite well	Achievement
G1-10	33-39	AB	I was called a swat cause in last 2 years I always got top marks for most things	Education
G1-10	33-39	AB	I wasn't pretty, or popular, we didn't have any money, but I enjoyed being top of the class	Competition
G1-10	240-245	AB	Could have gone to grammar at 13. They said no. I was upset. I liked sch. I was good at it	Ed/Parents
G1-3	670-674	ABU	Father-in-law thought as his son had got out of my bed, he could get in, so no help there	Patriarchy
G1-3	1294-1304	ABU	Abuse of maternity leave makes employers look twice at women of childbearing age	Employment
G1-5	923-940	ABU	Example of Wren raped on board ship	
G1-7	717-725	ABU	I was walked on for so many years, it got to be like a habit. Had to pull away from bad ma	Marriage
G1-7	314-327	ABU	I was on my own with a dirty-minded boss - examples of difficult situations	Harassment
G1-7	329-335	ABU	I wanted to get out of this job cause he was really pressuring me then	Harassment
G1-7	329-335	ABU	I wanted to get out of this job cause he was really frightening me. I didn't understand	
G1-7	339-346	ABU	Further examples of boss's abusive behaviour & father's actions	Male power
G1-7	350-356	ABU	Boss's abusive behaviour - got to the point of making me feel sick & really didn't want to	Male power
G1-8	421-450	ABU	Examples of employer's abuse & attitude change when she got married	Male power
G1-8	454-469	ABU	Examples of employer's abuse & attitude change when she got married	Male power
G1-8	454-469	ABU	Employer's abuse. I felt I handled it OK. But when you hear these things, that was me	Harassment
G1-8	477-480	ABU	I didn't think of it in terms of harassment at the time, but that's what it was	
G1-8	485-488	ABU	There was nobody to say anything to, apart from tell his wife. He was the managing direct	Harassment
G1-10	450-459	ABU	Some bosses creepy. 60s, very short skirts, reach up to high shelves, bend down for thin	Harassment
G1-10	450-459	ABU	You couldn't always have someone with you, just tried to stay out of their way	
G1-10	461-469	ABU	You haven't the confidence to say anything at 16. You think 'Am I imagining this'	
G1-10	461-469	ABU	One girl did complain & was called a trouble maker. They were just having a 'bit of fun'	Harassment
G1-10	461-469	ABU	They hold power over you. Difficult to do anything cause they can sack you	Male power
G1-3	59-74	ACH	A girl ecstatic to get a D for science, for her this was a great achievement	Achievement
G1-5	225-231	ACH	Did achieve nursing, but that was later on in life	Achievement
G1-5	541-548	ACH	Thought of nursing again, said I couldn't do it. Husband said yes you can. And I did it	Aspirations
G1-5	564-565	ACH	It was hard work but I was able to say 'I've achieved me dream'	Achievement
G1-12	102-121	AL	School-work transition- decided to leave, no one encouraged her to stay on	
G1-12	128-131	AL	School-work transition- teachers should have encouraged her to stay on	
G1-12	1132-1150	AL	School-work transition- didn't discuss with friends	
G1-12	1152-1156	AL	School-work transition- one day a child, next day an adult	
G1-12	1152-1156	AL	School-work transition- never thought about what to do next	
G1-12	1160-1173	AL	Adult life - at 16 didn't think about major life decisions	
G1-7	232-238	AL	I was nervous about going out into the big wide world, I had no experience of anything	

# APPENDIX 10

## Samples pages of teenage women's interview analysis database

11/9/2003

Interview Analysis - Schoolgirls

REF NO	LINE NO	CODE	EVENTS	DISCOURSES
G2-1	289-292	AB	You've got to be really good, really clever [to be a vet]	Ability/Asps
G2-2	62-64	AB	I'm not really good at any subjects, but I'm fairly good at German and art	Ability
G2-1	533-534	AB	It doesn't matter if it's a man or a w. I think they promote the one that's good	Employment
G2-2	446-454	AB	Women would get promoted rather than men because girls are better than boys	Employment
G2-3	139-144	AB	I got 'E' for the past 3 times I've done maths. Art coming along well. Chemistry not so good	Ability
G2-3	22-32	AB	Waiting for my results I thought 'God, I've done really rubbish'. Never happy, constantly moaning	Education
G2-3	22-32	AB	I got results. I was happy with them but thought I could have done better, could have done more	Education
G2-3	207-217	AB	Cause I'm doing resists, people say 'She's thick, she can't do the work'. Shout & laugh at me	Ability
G2-3	549-557	AB	Gave me money for 17th birthday to buy car. Dad told me to go and do it myself, cause I know h	Ability
G2-3	621-628	AB	Men can cook, they're not thick. I think it's their parents. Not like that any more. World's changed	Role/Parents
G2-6	213-220	AB	In the early years she used to knock of an that. But she's not thick, she is actually educated	Parents
G2-8	80-81	AB	I've got me results back from me exam an I gorra ment an a pass	Education
G2-8	109-112	AB	Was going to col to do chdc course. Didn't get the grades for that, so decided to do business	Education
G2-9	118-119	AB	I could never be [just a housewife]], just a waste really, & she's dead clever as well, got talent	Role/Parents
G2-9	277-278	AB	Ed's important for girls. Cause there's a lotta girls out there as good as boys, if not betta	Education
G2-9	480-486	AB	When younger I played football. Boys didn't have a problem because I was good enough	Role
G2-9	480-486	AB	You should be judged on your talent rather than who you are	Ability/Gender
G2-10	42-44	AB	GCSE results, know could've done betta, cause I was in top sets. So had a talk with meself	Ability
G2-10	48-50	AB	Thought 'I can do betta than this'. Came back & got me grades up. Resat, getting back on track	Ability
G2-10	141-150	AB	Lads get jealous if you get higher grades, or do something that makes them look inadequate	Ability/Gender
G2-10	387-392	AB	We're manager/director material. We're just as good as the men	Equality/Ability
G2-10	387-392	AB	In ed girls are doing better than boys, why aren't we acknowledged for this?	Education
G2-10	397-399	AB	Girls have a point to prove, to prove we can do it. It's like a fight everyday to be tret the same	Conflict
G2-10	415-419	AB	Prove we can achieve our goals. What we choose to do we should be able to do	Ability
G2-12	180-184	AB	ED's important for girls. Makes them get more jobs, & makes them put thinking caps on	Education
G2-11	330	AB	Just gerra good job & prove to men I can do it	Education
G2-3	667-684	ABU	Example of male boss 'hitting' on female employee. Results of going to court	Harassment
G2-4	364-371	ABU	You have bullies, which I hate. They pick on people for just like, 'Oh, yer swot'	Harassment
G2-4	466-484	ABU	But now you have women battering men and things like that	Harassment
G2-5	110-114	ABU	Me da keeps saying, when he was at sch, he used to get punched an that	Education
G2-6	225-227	ABU	They didn't like the teachers, really strict, used the cane. I don't blame her for not going	Education
G2-6	319-331	ABU	Example of cousin being bullied cause hair & clothes wrong, but you need money for right things	Harassment
G2-6	474-493	ABU	Waitressing. Hated it - gives examples, male chiefs behaving in a threatening sexist way	Harassment
G2-6	474-493	ABU	Chiefs threatening sexist behaviour. Scared us at first, then brushed it off. That's men for you	Harassment

APPENDIX 10 cont ...

Samples pages of teenage women's interview analysis database

Interview Analysis - Schoolgirls

11/9/2003

REF NO	LINE NO	CODE	EVENTS	DISCOURSES
G2-1	69-73	ACH	I did OK [in mocks] and was quite pleased	Ability
G2-1	289-292	ACH	I can be a vet if I can get the grades & everything, but I'm not sure if I could get the good grades	Aspirations
G2-1	313-316	ACH	Mum's got a friend who's a vet, but she must have worked really, really hard to get there	Aspirations
G2-3	273-277	ACH	It depends on you as a person. If you listen to teachers & do what they ask, you'll get there	Education
G2-4	488-502	ACH	Barbara Stinesand. I just think it's good what she's done with her life	Role Models
G2-7	317-327	ACH	Spice Girls gave out messages that it's not just boys who can succeed, it's girls as well	Role Models
G2-3	75-77	AL	When you're 17 you've got to go out there & think for yourself	Maturity
G2-4	225-229	AL	Slaying on at sch, I've changed a lot, like I'm mature anyway, I've become more mature	Maturity
G2-4	225-229	AL	But people who go to col, they think they've become this 'woman' thing, adults straight away	Maturity
G2-4	328-334	AL	In my adult life I think I'm gonna be same as mum. She gives me loads of advice about everything	Parents
G2-1	172-176	ASPS	Aiming for uni. I want to go to one in London	Aspirations
G2-1	272-277	ASPS	Wants to be a vet cause likes animals & couldn't work on humans. Illness makes her feel weird	Aspirations
G2-1	289-292	ASPS	I can be a vet if I can get the grades & everything, but I'm not sure if I could get the good grades	Education
G2-2	120	ASPS	I want to look after children	Aspirations
G2-2	124-127	ASPS	Social work for kids	
G2-2	159-160	ASPS	When I've finished school, Head said I might be able to look after nursery, or something like that	
G2-3	36-43	ASPS	I really did wanna go to col, but something just changed my mind. Thought, not where I want to be	
G2-3	36-43	ASPS	Always wanted to be in 6th form and be the big person, for once	
G2-3	295-301	ASPS	Ed is important. Some people would say 'I need to be in sch, go to col, uni. I don't want to do that	Education
G2-3	384	ASPS	An interior designer	Aspirations
G2-3	392	ASPS	[interior designer] Don't think this is likely to happen	
G2-3	413-417	ASPS	[interior design] Think the idea stopped when I decided not to go to college	
G2-3	413-417	ASPS	[interior design] And plus, there's not many jobs round here that do interior design	
G2-4	95-101	ASPS	At this age, right, nobody really knows what they wanna do, do they?	Aspirations
G2-4	139-144	ASPS	I was thinking of going to uni, cause I know what I wanna do, there's like a choice	Aspirations
G2-4	149-151	ASPS	Be a PE teacher or a singer & entertainer, any one of them, or teach singing	Aspirations
G2-3	574	ASPS	No aspirations to become a mechanic	
G2-4	291-295	ASPS	[uni or college] This very definitely likely to happen, it's what I expect to do	
G2-3	633-653	ASPS	Example of discrimination in joining army	Discrimination
G2-4	488-502	ASPS	I like most singers cause, like, I wanna be a singer myself	
G2-4	488-502	ASPS	I like most singers, don't wanna be anybody else. I wanna be me. I wanna be something different	
G2-5	64	ASPS	Probably in a travel agents or something. Something to do with tourism	Aspirations
G2-5	156-158	ASPS	I wanna gerra job & enjoy meself before I start a family and that's it	
G2-5	363-365	ASPS	I would like to think I could get promoted. But I'll just have to wait & see what happens	

GJ-MW

WHAT SHOULD WOMEN DO? MOTHERHOOD

- Women should be full-time mothers = pronatalist lobby
- At the end of WWII national concern about falling birth-rate, women encouraged to have large families
- Intersection of motherhood and economic/political discourses: encouragement to have large families was underpinned by a requirement to produce the workers of the future
- PROFESSIONAL discourse added psychological pressure = Bowlby's 'maternal deprivation' theory – caused deep guilt & anxiety in women
- Professional discourse POSITIONS women as subordinate and lacking in knowledge
- Motherhood discourse would have it that all women aspire to become mothers, this is their 'natural' role, a role that women will find totally fulfilling, a role that will validate their femininity
- In this motherhood discourse the GOOD MOTHER stays at home and looks after her children
- Do women CHOOSE to have children of their own free will?
- Patriarchal discourse has ascribed motherhood with these responsibilities as a means of controlling women's behaviour and sexuality
- Pronatalist lobby positions women in the home as dependent wives & mothers
- Intersection of pronatalist, motherhood, patriarchy, political & economic discourses

G1-MW

ROMANCE DISCOURSE

- ✓ Snares women into a position of powerless subordination, it is the man who initiates action and decides the parameters – there is nothing romantic about this account of power relations
- Couldn't ignore biological change/development
- ✓ Most of the girls spoke about them and their peers wanting boyfriends
- ✓ • Difficult to resist the romance discourse
- ✓ • Intersection of romance, femininity & patriarchy discourses
- ✓ • Boyfriends are important because they represent social success, they are a secure acceptable sign of femininity
- ✓ • The romance discourse is a lie – romance cannot last forever, it cannot sustain a marriage through all its troubles. How can domestic work – which falls to the woman – be described as romantic?
- ✓ • The romance discourse is so powerful that women are likely to fall for it – possibly more than once, thinking that this time they will make things different, theirs will be the unique survivor
- ✓ • Romance discourse sucks women into subservient positions, fooling them into thinking that they are doing all the domestic tasks as a way of showing their self-denying love when in fact it is another facet of male power and control
- ✓ • CHANGE - 1960s saw different constructions of the outcome of romantic discourse, no longer was the outcome necessarily marriage, there was free-love (a contradiction in terms), communal living, cohabitation and all manner of alternative lifestyles

GI-MW

ROMANCE DISCOURSE

- ✓ • Free love put sex on the public agenda, the pill lessened the fear of pregnancy which meant that women were free to experience sexual gratification and pleasure in the same way that men always had done
- ✓ • Traditional attitudes to sex and pregnancy persisted
  - There may well have been alternative constructions but sex remained problematic for girls, there was still the fear of pregnancy, in this sense the discourse of femininity remains strong with its emphasis on virginity
- ✓ • There was a great deal of shame attached to being pregnant outside of marriage, girls were still sent away, it was hushed up
- ✓ • Girls who became pregnant outside of marriage broke the rules of what constituted acceptable female behaviour
- ✓ • It also defies patriarchy, the legitimate controller of female sexuality and raises the possibility of girls making their own decisions about their sexuality
- ✓ • The biggest change factor was the introduction of the contraceptive pill - condoning non-marital sex, preventing unwanted pregnancy, it enabled women to make their own decisions about their sexuality, it put pressure on women to be sexually active, it divorced sex from pregnancy
- ✓ • This brought female sexuality into the public arena more than ever before and as it was spoken about it provided girls with an alternative construction of their sexuality, one in which it was permissible for girls to enjoy sex, rather than it being merely a means of servicing their husbands and producing children



**APPENDIX 12**

**Correspondence with Dr Whitehead, University of Cambridge, regarding survey instrument**

Linda Barlow-Meade

19 February 1998

Dear Dr Whitehead

I am a first-year PhD student at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle. My area of interest is an exploration of the impact of women's educational experiences on their life expectations and fulfilment of potential.

At this early stage I am immersed in substantive reading, as part of which I have just finished your paper 'Academically successful schoolgirls: a case of sex-role transcendence' in *Research Papers for Education*, which I found fascinating and thoroughly enjoyed.

Whilst my focus is not sex-role stereotyping directly, it obviously contributes to it, as your paper amply demonstrates. I am particularly interested in the questionnaires you used, most of which, you mention, were specifically designed for your project (p59)

Would it be at all possible for me to view these instruments, as I feel that they could be extremely beneficial to me in constructing my own.

Thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedule to read this. It is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Linda Barlow-Meade

**APPENDIX 12 cont ...**

**Correspondence with Dr Whitehead, University of Cambridge, regarding survey instrument**

*School of Education*

*Head of School: Professor Donald McIntyre MA MEd  
Secretary of the School: Gillian Morley MA*



UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

March 4th 1998

Dear Mrs Barlow-Meade

Please find enclosed a copy of the questionnaire you requested - rather an old and battered one I'm afraid - I do have better copies of sections of it but this is the only complete one I can lay my hands on at the moment. I also enclose a scoring key for some of the scales.

If you have any further questions about the scales please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

*Joan Whitehead*

Dr Joan M Whitehead

17 Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1QA  
Telephone: 01223 332888 Fax: 01223 332894 Internet: <http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk>

**APPENDIX 12 cont ...**

**Correspondence with Dr Whitehead, University of Cambridge, regarding survey instrument**

Below are a number of statements. Please indicate opposite each one how strongly you agree or disagree with each of them by placing a tick (✓) in one of the five boxes next to each statement.

I would:

	strongly agree	agree on the whole	have no feelings either way	disagree on the whole	strongly disagree
R1 If both the husband and wife work then housework should be shared equally between them	5	4	3	2	1
R2 Men should be expected to pay all the expenses while they are out on a date	5	4	3	2	1
R3 Girls should be more concerned with learning to be good mothers and how to run a home than gaining the qualifications for a career	5	4	3	2	1
R4 Men should always be given preference over women in job appointments and promotions	5	4	3	2	1
R5 People in authority make rules for good reasons and therefore they should be obeyed and not questioned	5	4	3	2	1
R6 If women work they should only do so in occupations that are regarded as 'feminine'	5	4	3	2	1
R7 Living away from home and standing on my own feet is something I feel I have to do					
R8 I think women should continue their careers, even if they get married, as being a full-time housewife is not very satisfying	5	4	3	2	1
R9 A man who could not earn enough to support a family is really a failure	5	4	3	2	1
R10 Most women need and want the kind of protection and support that men have traditionally given them	5	4	3	2	1
R11 The task of bringing up children should be shared equally between husband and wife	5	4	3	2	1
R12 If a husband is offered a good job in one place and the wife a good job in another then the family should always move to the husband's job					
R13 It is more important for boys to gain educational qualifications than girls	5	4	3	2	1

**APPENDIX 12 cont ...**

**Correspondence with Dr Whitehead, University of Cambridge, regarding survey instrument**

I would:

	strongly agree	agree on the whole	have no feelings either way	disagree on the whole	strongly disagree
R14 I think it is wrong; that in our society it is automatically assumed that everyone should get married	5	4	3	2	1
R15 Women should only work outside the home if the family needs the money	5	4	3	2	1
R16 A man should be able to stay at home and look after children if he wants to	5	4	3	2	1
R17 A women's self-respect depends on her being married	5	4	3	2	1
R18 Being independent is very important to me	5	4	3	2	1
R19 I would find it very boring, staying at home doing the housework	5	4	3	2	1
R20 The idea that men should always be breadwinners and women homemakers limits the freedom of individuals to choose what they would like to do	5	4	3	2	1
R21 In a marriage it is important that the man earns more than the woman	5	4	3	2	1
R22 I see no reason why the traditional roles of men and women should be changed	5	4	3	2	1
R23 It is just as important for a woman to have a successful and worthwhile career as a man	5	4	3	2	1
R24 I would find it difficult to respect a man who stayed at home to look after children while his wife worked	5	4	3	2	1
R25 It is more important to me to have a good career than it is to get married	5	4	3	2	1
R26 Training for a career is not really essential for a woman as she will give up work when she gets married and have children	5	4	3	2	1
R27 I would not like to be dependent on my marriage partner for money	5	4	3	2	1
R28 A woman's pay does not have to be as high as a man's because women do not have to support a family	5	4	3	2	1
R29 A woman's main role in life is to be a good wife and mother	5	4	3	2	1

**‘Women’s Work’: An exploration of women’s learning experiences on their life expectations and aspirations.**

Dear Respondent

I am a PhD research student in the Faculty of Health, Social Work and Education at the University of Northumbria, Newcastle.

The Aims of my study are to explore the impact of women’s learning experiences on the fulfilment their life’s expectations and aspirations.

To assist me in investigating these aims I would appreciate it if you could complete the attached questionnaire, which should take approximately 15/20 minutes to complete.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

**LB-M**

**APPENDIX 13 cont ...**  
**Live questionnaire & covering letter**

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

Ref No: \_\_\_\_\_

Let me start by saying "Thank you very much" for giving your time to complete this questionnaire. The information you supply for the **first section** will help me to identify the age groups and life paths of the whole survey population, as well as contact information for any follow-up activity. This information will not be used in any other way, will not be passed to anyone else and will be strictly confidential.

**I GENERAL INFORMATION**

I 1 Name \_\_\_\_\_

I 2 Contact Address  
& Postcode \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I 3 Please indicate your age group by placing a tick ✓ in the appropriate box

16 or less ☐ 17 - 21 ☐ 22 - 30 ☐ 31 - 40 ☐ 41 - 50 ☐  
50+ ☐

I 4 Which of the following are you currently attending? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Compulsory state education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Higher education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Further education	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community learning programme	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify _____	

**2     COMPULSORY STATE EDUCATION**

Section 2 deals with compulsory state education, a process we all go through, it provides a starting point for our personal learning journey

- 2.1     Which type of senior school did you / do you attend? (Tick ✓ more than one if appropriate)

Secondary Modern  
Technical  
Grammar  
Comprehensive  
Private  
Other

please specify \_\_\_\_\_

☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

- 2.2     Which examinations were taken/are to be taken during compulsory state education? (Tick ✓ as many as appropriate)

None  
Eleven-plus  
O-Levels  
A-Levels  
CSEs  
GCSEs  
GNVQs  
Other

please specify \_\_\_\_\_

☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

- 2.3     Please state (in years) the age at which you left / intend to leave compulsory state education \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.4     Please list three things you most liked / like about school
- 2.5     Please list three things you most disliked / dislike about school

Section 3 goes on to consider the attitudes of you, and other influential people in your life, to continuing education and learning after completing compulsory state education

1 = highly discouraging  
2 = discouraging  
3 = slightly discouraging  
4 = slightly encouraging  
5 = encouraging  
6 = highly encouraging

- | Highly Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Highly Encouraging |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|

- |                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |                    |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Highly Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Highly Encouraging |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|

- |                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |                    |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Highly Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Highly Encouraging |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|

- |                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |                    |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Highly Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Highly Encouraging |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|

- |                     |   |   |   |   |   |   |                    |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| Highly Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Highly Encouraging |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|



**APPENDIX 13 cont ...**  
**Live questionnaire & covering letter**

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**'Women's Work' Questionnaire**

3.6 How would you describe your **teachers'** attitudes to girls continuing their education?

Highly	1	2	3	4	5	6	Highly
Discouraging							Encouraging

3.7 How would you describe your **school peer's** attitudes to continuing education?

Highly	1	2	3	4	5	6	Highly
Discouraging							Encouraging

3.8 How would you describe your **partner's** (if appropriate) attitude to you continuing your education?

Highly	1	2	3	4	5	6	Highly
Discouraging							Encouraging

3.9 How would you describe **your** attitude to continuing your education?

Highly	1	2	3	4	5	6	Highly
Discouraging							Encouraging

# **APPENDIX 13 cont ...** **Live questionnaire & covering letter**

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

Sections 4 and 5 are concerned with expectations and aspirations

## **IF YOU ARE STILL ATTENDING COMPULSORY STATE EDUCATION**

i.e. pre 'A'-levels, please continue with section 4, and then go on to section 6

## **IF YOU HAVE COMPLETED COMPULSORY STATE EDUCATION:**

please continue with section 5

### **4     EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS** **FOR THOSE STILL AT SCHOOL, I.E. PRE-'A'-LEVELS**

- 4.1     **Aspirations** are those goals / ambitions / dreams, call them what you will, that you most want to achieve in your life

What are your **aspirations** for your future life? (Tick ✓ as many boxes as appropriate)

Remain single	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education/Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-employment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify _____	

- 4.2     **Expectations** are the things you feel you are most likely to do in your life

What are your, and your parents', expectations for your future life? (Tick ✓ as many boxes as appropriate)

	You	Your Parents
Remain single	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education/Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify _____		

## APPENDIX 13 cont ...

### Live questionnaire & covering letter

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

#### 5 EXPECTATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS - FOR THOSE WHO HAVE COMPLETED COMPULSORY STATE EDUCATION

5.1 Aspirations are those goals / ambitions / dreams, call them what you will, that you may want/wanted to achieve in your life

What were your **aspirations** for your life before you left school / what are your aspirations for the future now? (Tick ✓ as many boxes as appropriate)

	On leaving school	Future
Remain single	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education/Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify _____		

5.2 Expectations are the things you feel you are most likely to do, or have done, in your life

What did your **parents expect** you to do when you left school / What did you **actually do**? (Tick ✓ as many boxes as appropriate)

	Parents Expectations	What you actually did
Remain single	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marriage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Education/Learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non-employment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify: _____		

5.3 If you have been employed, did you receive any training?

Yes ☐ No ☐

5.4 If 'Yes' what type of training was it?

## 6 PERSONAL ATTITUDES

Following on from Aspirations and Expectations, Section 6 looks at some attitudes concerning life.

Below are a number of statements. Please indicate opposite each one how strongly you personally agree or disagree with each of the items by placing a tick (✓) in one of the boxes to each statement.

**Please tick what you really believe - not what you think is the 'correct' answer**

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree on the whole	Agree on the whole	Strongly Agree
1	Housework is a shared activity where both partners are in employment				
2	Men are expected to pay all the expenses when out on a date				
3	Girls are more interested in learning to be mothers and running a home than they are in gaining career qualifications				
4	Generally men are given preference over women in job appointments and promotions				
5	Women should work in occupations that are regarded as 'feminine' wherever possible				
6	Living away from home and standing on one's own feet is a desirable personal goal				
7	Women continue their careers, even after marriage, because full-time housework is not very satisfying				
8	Men who do not earn enough to support a family are considered failures				
9	Most women need and want the kind of protection and support that men have traditionally given them				
10	Bringing up children is a task shared equally between both partners				
11	If a man is offered a good job in one place and his partner a good job in another then the family should move to the man's job				
12	It is more important for boys to gain educational qualifications than girls				
13	In our society it is automatically assumed that the correct life-choice is to get married				
14	Women only work outside the home in order to contribute to the family income				
15	Men are free to stay at home and look after children if they want to				
16	A woman's self-respect depends on her being married				

**APPENDIX 13 cont ...**  
**Live questionnaire & covering letter**

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree on the whole	Agree on the whole	Strongly Agree
17	Being independent is important				
18	Staying at home doing the housework is not very fulfilling				
19	The idea that men should always be breadwinners and women homemakers limits the freedom of individuals to choose what they would like to do				
20	In a partnership it is important that the man earns more than the woman				
21	The traditional roles of men and women do not need to be changed				
22	Women's careers are just as important and worthwhile as men's				
23	Men who stay at home to look after children while their wives work lack respect				
24	Having a good career is more important than getting married				
25	Work-based training for women is not essential as they will give up work when they get married and have children				
26	Being dependent on a partner for money is dissatisfying				
27	A woman's pay does not have to be as high as a man's because women do not have to support a family				
28	A woman's main role in life is to be a good wife and mother				

**APPENDIX 13 cont ...**  
**Live questionnaire & covering letter**

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

**7 FAMILY BACKGROUND**

Finally, Section 7 asks for some general information about your family background

- 7.1 How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- |          |                          |
|----------|--------------------------|
| None     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Brothers | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sisters  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**If you are an only child please continue with question 7.7**

- 7.2 What is your position in the order of birth? (e.g. 1<sup>st</sup>, e.g. 3<sup>rd</sup> of 5 etc) ☐
- 7.3 How many of your **brothers actually** stayed on at school? ☐
- 7.4 How many of your **brothers will probably** stay on at school? ☐
- 7.5 How many of your **sisters actually** stayed on at school? ☐
- 7.6 How many of your **sisters will probably** stay on at school? ☐
- 7.7 Did either of your parents continue with their education post-16?
- |        |                          |
|--------|--------------------------|
| No     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Father | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mother | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 7.8 How would you describe your childhood family
- |               |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| Working class | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Middle class  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Upper class   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- 7.9 Father's job / industry \_\_\_\_\_
- 7.10 Mother's job / industry \_\_\_\_\_
- 7.11 Partner's job / industry \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX 13 cont ...**  
**Live questionnaire & covering letter**

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

7 12 Who has/had the major responsibilities for housework?

	Childhood Family	Own Family (if applicable)
Self	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self and Partner Jointly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father and Mother Jointly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sister(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brother(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sisters and Brothers Jointly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify _____		

7 13 Who has/had the major responsibilities for child-care / dependent-care?

	Childhood Family	Own Family (if applicable)
Self	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self and Partner Jointly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Father and Mother Jointly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sister(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brother(s)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sisters and Brothers Jointly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not Applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
please specify _____		

**APPENDIX 13 cont ...**  
**Live questionnaire & covering letter**

'Women's Work' Questionnaire

**8      OPEN SECTION FOR YOUR COMMENTS**

Section 8 is an open section for you to raise any additional points/comments you wish, either the questions in the questionnaire, or any other points you would like to raise

That completes the questionnaire. Once again, thank you. I very much appreciate the time you have given to complete it.

The next stage of my research will be to follow up the information provided here with a number of interviews to develop some of the themes. Would you be interested in being part of the interview group?

Yes ☐      No ☐

I will contact you again at a later stage

**LB-M**



Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (1990) *Standard Occupational Classification*, Vol 2, London, HMSO (pp13-42)

## STRUCTURE OF THE CLASSIFICATION

### **Major Group 1        -        Managers and Administrators**

#### Minor Groups

- 10    General Managers and Administrators in national and local government, large companies and organisations
- 11    Production Managers in manufacturing, construction, mining and energy industries
- 12    Specialist Managers
- 13    Financial Institution and Office Managers, Civil Service Executive Officers
- 14    Managers in transport and storing
- 15    Protective Service Officers
- 16    Managers in farming, horticulture, forestry and fishing
- 17    Managers and Proprietors in service industries
- 19    Managers and Administrators NEC

### **Major Group 2        -        Professional Occupations**

#### Minor Groups

- 20    Natural Scientists
- 21    Engineers and Technologists
- 22    Health Professionals
- 23    Teaching Professionals
- 24    Legal Professionals
- 25    Business and Financial Professionals
- 26    Architects, Town Planners and Surveyors
- 27    Librarians and Related Professionals
- 29    Professional Occupations NEC

### **Major Group 3        -        Associate Professional and Technical Occupations**

#### Minor Groups

- 30    Scientific Technicians
- 31    Draughtspersons, Quantity and Other Surveyors
- 32    Computer Analyst/Programmers
- 33    Ship and Aircraft Officers, Air Traffic Planners and Controllers
- 34    Health Associate Professionals
- 35    Legal Associate Professionals
- 36    Business and Financial Associate Professionals
- 37    Social Welfare Associate Professionals
- 38    Literary, Artistic and Sports Professionals
- 39    Associate Professional and Technical Occupations NEC

**APPENDIX 14 cont ...**  
**Standard Occupational Classification**

**Major Group 4        -        Clerical and Secretarial Occupations**

Minor Groups

- 40     Administrative/Clerical Officers and Assistants in Civil Service and Local Government
- 41     Numerical Clerks and Cashiers
- 42     Filing and Records Clerks
- 43     Clerks (Not otherwise specified)
- 44     Stores and Despatch Clerks, Storekeepers
- 45     Secretaries, Personal Assistants, Typists, Word Processor Operators
- 46     Receptionists, Telephonists and Related Occupations
- 49     Clerical and Secretarial Occupations NEC

**Major Group 5        -        Craft and Related Occupations**

Minor Groups

- 50     Construction Trades
- 51     Metal Machining, Fitting and Instrument Making Trades
- 52     Electrical/Electronic Trades
- 53     Metal Forming, Welding and Related Trades
- 54     Vehicle Trades
- 55     Textiles, Garments and Related Trades
- 56     Printing and Related Trades
- 57     Woodworking Trades
- 58     Food Preparation Trades
- 59     Other Craft and Related Occupations NEC

**Major Group 6        -        Personal and Protective Service Occupations**

Minor Groups

- 60     NCOs and Other Ranks, Armed Forces
- 61     Security and Protective Service Occupations
- 62     Catering Occupations
- 63     Travel Attendants and Related Occupations
- 64     Health and Related Occupations
- 65     Childcare and Related Occupations
- 66     Hairdressers, Beauticians and Related Occupations
- 67     Domestic Staff and Related Occupations
- 69     Personal and Protective Service Occupations NEC

**Major Group 7        -        Sales Occupations**

Minor Groups

- 70     Buyers, Brokers and Related Agents
- 71     Sales Representatives
- 72     Sales Assistants and Check-out Operators
- 73     Mobile, Market and Door-to-door Salespersons
- 79     Sales Occupations NEC

**Major Group 8            -            Plant and Machine Operatives**

Minor Groups

- 80      Food, Drink and Tobacco Process Operatives
- 81      Textiles and Tannery Process Operatives
- 82      Chemicals, Paper, Plastics and Related Process Operatives
- 83      Metal Making and Treating Process Operatives
- 84      Metal Working Process Operatives
- 85      Assemblers/Lineworkers
- 86      Other Routine Process Operatives
- 87      Road Transport Operatives
- 88      Other Transport and Machinery Operatives
- 89      Plant and Machine Operatives NEC

**Major Group 9            -            Other Occupations**

Minor Groups

- 90      Other Occupations in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
- 91      Other Occupations in Mining and Manufacturing
- 92      Other Occupations in Construction
- 93      Other Occupations in Transport
- 94      Other Occupations in Communication
- 95      Other Occupations in Sales and Service
- 99      Other Occupations NEC

## Percentage results for Section 6 of the survey – Social Attitudes

**SECTION 6      SOCIAL ATTITUDES      -      SUMMARY**

		Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree on the whole (%)	Agree on the whole (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
1	Housework is a shared activity where both partners are in employment	MW – 0 SG – 1	MW – 5 SG – 4	MW – 36 SG – 43	MW – 52 SG – 52
2	Men are expected to pay all the expenses when out on a date	MW – 13 SG – 20	MW – 46 SG – 43	MW – 26 SG – 25	MW – 6 SG – 10
3	Girls are more interested in learning to be mothers and running a home than they are in gaining career qualifications	MW – 46 SG – 63	MW – 35 SG – 23	MW – 10 SG – 9	MW – 2 SG – 5
4	Men are given preference over women in job appointments and promotions	MW – 2 SG – 14	MW – 27 SG – 43	MW – 45 SG – 32	MW – 15 SG – 8
5	Women should work in occupations that are regarded as 'feminine' wherever possible	MW – 51 SG – 68	MW – 30 SG – 21	MW – 7 SG – 6	MW – 2 SG – 2
6	Living away from home and standing on one's own feet is a desirable personal goal	MW – 0 SG – 5	MW – 11 SG – 12	MW – 31 SG – 49	MW – 50 SG – 33
7	Women continue their careers, even after marriage, because full-time housework is not very satisfying	MW – 11 SG – 8	MW – 17 SG – 13	MW – 37 SG – 39	MW – 27 SG – 37
8	Men who do not earn enough to support a family are considered failures	MW – 31 SG – 50	MW – 33 SG – 37	MW – 21 SG – 8	MW – 6 SG – 5
9	Most women need and want the kind of protection and support that men have traditionally given them	MW – 14 SG – 7	MW – 31 SG – 32	MW – 38 SG – 48	MW – 8 SG – 12
10	Bringing up children is a task shared equally between both partners	MW – 7 SG – 1	MW – 14 SG – 3	MW – 27 SG – 18	MW – 44 SG – 76
11	If a man is offered a good job in one place and his partner a good job in another then the family should move to the man's job.	MW – 26 SG – 52	MW – 35 SG – 40	MW – 29 SG – 3	MW – 1 SG – 2
12	It is more important for boys to gain educational qualifications than girls	MW – 64 SG – 77	MW – 23 SG – 19	MW – 5 SG – 2	MW – 0 SG – 1
13	In our society it is automatically assumed that the correct life-choice is to get married	MW – 21 SG – 27	MW – 27 SG – 43	MW – 37 SG – 24	MW – 7 SG – 5
14	Women only work outside the home in order to contribute to the family income	MW – 29 SG – 39	MW – 45 SG – 43	MW – 17 SG – 14	MW – 2 SG – 2
15	Men are free to stay at home and look after children if they want to	MW – 6 SG – 5	MW – 26 SG – 8	MW – 37 SG – 43	MW – 23 SG – 44
16	A woman's self-respect depends on her being married	MW – 63 SG – 61	MW – 24 SG – 32	MW – 5 SG – 3	MW – 1 SG – 3

**APPENDIX 15 cont ...**

**Percentage results for Section 6 of the survey – Social Attitudes**

		Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree on the whole (%)	Agree on the whole (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
17	Being independent is important	MW – 1 SG - 1	MW – 6 SG - 2	MW – 30 SG - 43	MW – 56 SG - 52
18	Staying at home doing the housework is not very fulfilling	MW – 2 SG - 5	MW – 23 SG - 9	MW – 38 SG - 38	MW – 30 SG - 46
19	The idea that men should always be breadwinners and women homemakers limits the freedom of individuals to choose what they would like to do	MW – 6 SG - 12	MW – 12 SG - 26	MW – 31 SG - 35	MW – 44 SG - 19
20	In a partnership it is important that the man earns more than the woman	MW – 46 SG - 58	MW – 36 SG - 34	MW – 8 SG - 4	MW – 2 SG - 1
21	The traditional roles of men and women do not need to be changed	MW – 32 SG - 41	MW – 42 SG - 36	MW – 15 SG - 13	MW – 2 SG - 6
22	Women's careers are just as important and worthwhile as men's	MW – 1 SG - 4	MW – 1 SG - 3	MW – 26 SG - 14	MW – 64 SG - 75
23	Men who stay at home to look after children while their wives work lack respect	MW – 49 SG - 45	MW – 33 SG - 38	MW – 10 SG - 10	MW – 1 SG - 2
24	Having a good career is more important than getting married	MW – 10 SG - 5	MW – 42 SG - 26	MW – 26 SG - 48	MW – 13 SG - 15
25	Work-based training for women is not essential as they will give up work when they get married and have children	MW – 65 SG - 55	MW – 23 SG - 35	MW – 2 SG - 6	MW – 2 SG - 1
26	Being dependent on a partner for money is dissatisfying	MW – 6 SG - 9	MW – 18 SG - 13	MW – 36 SG - 44	MW – 40 SG - 28
27	A woman's pay does not have to be as high as a man's because women do not have to support a family	MW – 63 SG - 59	MW – 31 SG - 27	MW – 5 SG - 6	MW – 1 SG 3
28	A woman's main role in life is to be a good wife and mother	MW – 54 SG - 55	MW – 23 SG - 21	MW – 19 SG - 14	MW – 5 SG - 5